THE GREATEST HORROR COMIC : TALES FROM THE CRYPT

COMIC BOOKS

# COMICS FEATURE™

NUMBER 54
APRIL 1987
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The exciting exclusive story behind...

THE 'NAM

ROY THOMAS' GOLDEN AGE HISTORY OF
CAPTAIN MARVEL

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A
SUPERMAN WORLD

MIKE BENTON TELLS HOW TO
INVEST IN MARVELS

JAYSON DISBROW TELLS HOW HE CREATED
CAPT. ELECTRON

A COMPLETE HERO HISTORY OF
MAGNUS

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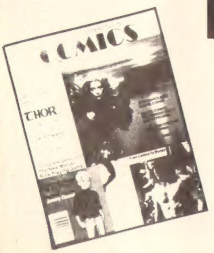
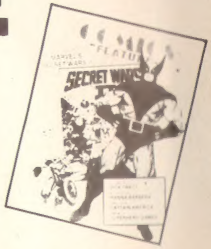
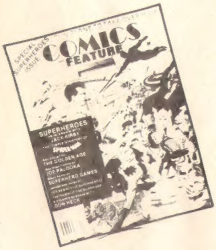
# COMICS FEATURE





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# HAPPY HAL'S HOWLINGS

This issue of **COMICS FEATURE** ranges across the genres and the decades. There is a bit of something for everyone. Whether you're wondering just which Marvel comics are worth investing in or what is happening in the world of independent publishing, you'll find something to excite you. If you have just begun to read the adventures of the new Captain Marvel you'll be able to learn all about the original one, from the writer who is chronicling the adventures of the new one. If in the midst of the renaissance in Superman you're waxing a bit nostalgic for the old tales, Gerard Jones takes us back to the days when Mort Weisinger created a super world. Whether you want to learn of a long-gone superhero from a company that no longer publishes comic books, Magnus, or the greatest horror stories ever told in the four color world, by EC Comics, you'll get just what you want. Even if you are one of those people who never quite gave up on the idea that comic book stories could tell tales of adventure and drama at a human level you'll be happy as Doug Murray explains how he creates **The Nam** and **Merc**. This time there's really something for everyone!

You may have noticed the interesting new artwork that graces the pages of our Fun & Profit column for the past couple of issues. They are by Matt Hawes, a young illustrator that is bound to go far in this field. He deserves a nod of the cap for his carefully rendered and oh-so-appropriate pieces.

The feature story is even more interesting than usual as Doug Murray is interviewed by John Peel, a close personal friend of Doug's and a contributing editor of **COMICS FEATURE**. Because of this unusual circumstance we have broken from following our editorial stylebook this time around. Instead of referring to Doug as "Murray" throughout, we've kept on a first name basis. Just thought you might like to know. There is one other thing that makes interviewing Doug seem like old home week—even besides the fact that we were the first and only publication devoted to comic books to talk to him before the first issue of his mag had appeared about a year ago—and that is that he is writing a series of books about the old **Outer Limits** television series and beginning a series about **Battlestar Galactica**. The editor of both sets of books? None other than old...

HAPPY HAL

NUMBER 54

# COMICS FEATURE

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## STAFF

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**Ron Goulart**
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## FEATURES

### WARS LARGE AND SMALL
### THE NAM AND MERC

For decades the comic book world has rejected every type of story but the superheroic. One by one the other genres have fallen into the dust. There are no longer any comic books with stories of romance, the old west, true crime or traditional horror on the newsstands. Even the once-popular war comics field seemed to be doomed. That is until recently. Now the two most popular comics are **G.I. Joe** and **The Nam**, both comic books about soldiers at war, conventional or fantastic. Doug Murray is largely responsible for breathing life back into a dying genre. As the author of **The Nam** he has proven that stories of real people facing danger and heroism do sell. Now he has taken over **Merc** and hopes to prove that the same realistic approach can work there as well. The traditions of Milton Caniff and Noel Sickles are revived at the hands of this talented scribe. In an exclusive interview with John Peel, Murray talks about his past as a soldier, the method he uses in approaching the writing of a war story and how he creates a character. There is lots more including the planned death of the merc and the rebirth of a new merc.

26

## COLUMNS

**INDEPENDENT LINE—**
Jayson Disbrow was a prominent science fiction comic artist in the '50s, now he's back with a new hero combining computer science with superheroics for the '80s, and he explains how he did it. Plus the latest listings and the hottest news about your favorite independent comic books!
**9**

**GOLDEN AGE—**
Roy Thomas is chronicling the adventures of a brand new Captain Marvel for DC Comics. But here he pays tribute to the original Big Red Cheese.
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**FUN & PROFIT—**
Mike Benton reveals that although Marvel Comics are the blue chip investment of the four color world there are still loads of underrated books. Mike suggests a few and tells you how to spot the others!
**20**

**HEROES—**
Gold Key used to do comic books with such superheroes as Dr. Solar and Mighty Samson. Then there was the one with Magnus, Robot Fighter. James Van Hise explains that with story and art by Russ Manning, it was one of the best reads of all!
**36**

**SILVER AGE—**
Once upon a time there was a super world created ny Mort Weisinger and his band of talented scribes.
The stories, according to Gerard Jones, had truely mythic proportions.
**40**

**BEFORE THE SILVER AGE**
EC Comics revolutionized the way things were done in the four color world. They set new standards for war stories, sci fi adventures and tales of the supernatural. **Tales from the Crypt** was one of their best!
**44**

# FEATURE NEWS

## JONNY QUEST CLASSICS

**Jonny Quest Classics**, set for a debut in May, will be a new companion mini-series to Comico's regular **Jonny Quest**. The new series will be written and drawn by Doug Wildey, the original creator of the tv series on which the comic books are based. Each issue of **Jonny Quest Classics** will feature an adaptation of one of the original tv episodes. While at press time, the contents of each book are still not definite, rumor has it that the three stories to be used are "Calcutta Adventure," "Shadow of the Condor" and "The Werewolf of the Timberlands."

## NAM, MILLER AND G.I. JOE TRADE PAPERBACKS

Marvel will publish five special trade paperback editions in 1987, reprinting **The Nam**, **G.I. Joe Order of Battle**, the Frank Miller/Dave Mazzucchelli **Daredevil** issues, **The Transformers Universe** and the Chris Claremont/Frank Miller **Wolverine** limited series.

They will be produced in the 7x10 format used for the bestselling **X-Men** "Phoenix Saga" and the paperback volumes of the **Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe.**

"For months distributors and retailers have been urging us to offer more material in a Phoenix-style package," Director of Specialty Sales Carol Kalish noted. "With so much available material worthy of the bookshelf format, we were more than happy to oblige."

**The Wolverine** is scheduled to ship March 17; **The 'Nam** on May 19; **G.I. Joe Order of Battle** on July 14; **Transformers Universe** on September 1 and **Daredevil** on October 13.

"All of the editions will be out before Christmas rush hits, so the retailers will have a wide variety of product for the holiday gift-buying season," Kalish noted. "In the meanwhile, we will be very interested to hear what...(everyone) would like to see included in the next group of collections."

## RETURN OF THE DOOM PATROL

As readers of **New Teen Titans**, **Teen Titans Spotlight**, **Suicide Squad** and **Vigilante** no doubt suspect, there is a new Doom Patrol book on the way. The original focus of the book will center on Celsius's certainty that the Chief is still alive. Other members of the team are not yet announced although there are some reasons to believe that neither Negative Woman nor Robotman will be returning. The members of the team will be clearly in the mold of the original characters from the '60s in that each will be an outcast. Early issues of the series will see the addition of new members to the team. The series is scheduled to premiere in July.

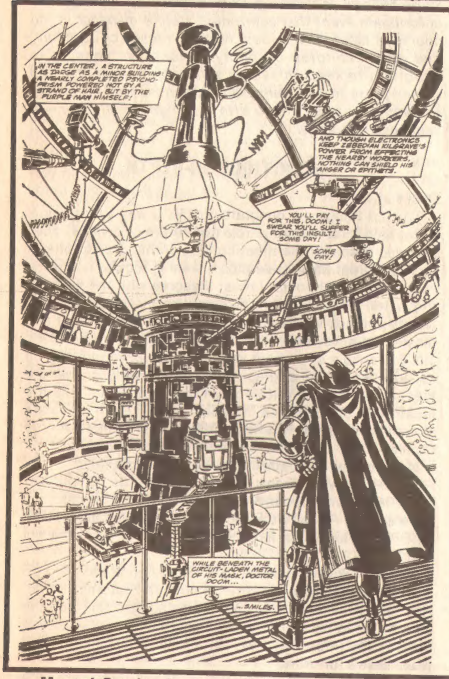
## LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE

The farmbelt has its very own superhero now. Max Allan Collins, a former **COMICS FEATURE** columnist and current author of both **Batman** and **Ms. Tree** as well as the Dick Tracy comic strip and a number of mystery novels, and Terry Beatty, the artist of **Ms. Tree**, have developed a new series for DC Comics based on a character that is either male or female, may be an ex-football player, probably served in Vietnam. The hero's clothing is made up of items that one could buy in a sporting goods or clothing store and the weapons used could be ordered right out of an issue of **Soldier of Fortune**. **Red Dog** will be launched as a mini-series in late spring and may begin a regular series in late fall.

Other planned new DC titles include a continuation of Chaykin's **Shadow** mini-series by Andrew Helfer and Bill Sienkiewicz and a 12-issue limited series featuring a new character called Silverblade to be written by Cary Bates and drawn and inked by Gene Colan and Klaus Janson respectively.

# EARLY LOOK:

## Special Dr. Doom Graphic Novel


IN THE CENTER, A STRUCTURE AS YET UNSEEN BY MAN! A MIRACLE COMA MINDS BUILDING PRISM POWERED TOY BY PSYCHO-STRAND OF HAIR, BUT BY THE PURPLE MAN HIMSELF!
AND THOUGH ELECTRONICS KEEP FEBRIAN KILGRAVE'S POWER FROM EFFECTING THE NEARBY HOMERS, NOTHING CAN SHIELD HIS ANGER OR BRITNEY!
YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS, DOOM! I'LL SUFFER FOR THIS INSULT! SOME DAY!
SOME DAY!
WHILE BENEATH THE CIRCLE-FADEN METAL OF HIS MASK, DOCTOR DOOM...
—BAILES

AND SO...
NEVERTHELESS, THE TWINS BEGIN PURSUING PICTURES AT A SPEED THAT LEAVES THEM LITTLE MORE THAN BLURS. BUT BECAUSE OF THEIR CONCENTRATION ON THE WATCHERS THEMSELVES, THEY DO NOTICE THE TELL-TALE SIGNS OF THESE MASTERS: CRACKS AND FISSURES IN THE WARPED WALLS OF ALABASTER, THE UNNATURAL BAREness OF BLIND VISION. STILL, THE QUESTION REMAINS:
IS IT ENOUGH?
DAD WHO'S THIS MAN?
HE'S BEEN "HAD."
I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN HAVING A DREAM, AND NOT SURE I FEEL "HAD" TO WAKE UP.

**Marvel Comics has sent us an advance preview copy of the new Avengers graphic novel, "Emperor Doom," written by David Michelinie and Penciled and inked by Bob Hall. Jim Salicrup is the editor. We thought that you might like an early look.**

"Emperor Doom" is a 64-page graphic novel set to ship on February 24.

**ANNOUNCING A NEW SEMI-REGULAR SECTION!**

**EARLY LOOK** will become a regular feature of Feature News with this issue. In this section readers will get an early look at actual pages from upcoming special comic book projects. This feature will run as often as we are able to come up with interesting items—Happy Hal

# LETTERS

Send all comments and correspondence to:
COMICS FEATURE
8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Suite 210
Canoga Park, CA 91304

## A SERIOUS ISSUE

Hal,

The issue of this letter may be deemed as very important since it may effect the selling of comic books in the future. The issue I'm refering to is the *arrest of Michael Correa*, manager of the Lansing Illinois Friendly Frank's Comics Inc. on charges of intent to disseminate obscene material. The store was then closed for violation of zoning regulations which restrict the sale of adult material within 1200 feet of a residential area. The books that are charged with being obscene writing are **Bizarre Sex #5, The Bodyssey, Heavy Metal Murder #2-3, Omaha the Cat Dancer #1-3** and **Weirdo #17-18.** The officer in charge also informed the other officers that many of the titles for sale were *satanic*! Friendly Frank's contacted the publishers who made the comic books in question. Many offered to help out financially while others promised to help in other ways. *Frank Miller* is talking of making a benefit book to help create a defense fund, so if and when this happens, the company will have extra funds for a stronger legal defense. (This preceding information appeared in the Worthy of Note section on the order form issued by Friendly Frank's. It was entitled **Comics on Trial.**)

I'm strongly against this outrage. First of all there is the First Amendment right of freedom of the press. What makes a comic different from **The New York Times** (in the eyes of the law)? Not only this, but some of the officers verbally objectec to a Wonder Woman poster. The poster was a copy of issue one's wraparound cover. DC (and Marvel) have about 95% of their books approved by the Comics Code Authority. Not only does the code approve the contents of the comic but the covers as well. If the cover was approved, how then could it be "objectionable." If any one should be charged here—and I feel that no one should be—it should be the company that published the books.

If people are afraid of little Johnny seeing the She-Hulk run around with green ripped clothes hanging from her, then maybe they ought to take a look at the tv once in a while. There is more violence on tv now then ever before. Maybe the store did break the zoning laws, but that still doesn't give the city any right to shut down a store (Friendly Frank's lawyer had it reopened) that sells comics of such nature with a few mentions of supposedly perverted things. There is certainly a 7-11 that still sells **Playboy** somewhere, and is the same distance from a residential neighborhood as is the comic shop. Comics are a visual way of telling a story much like tv and movies and should be treated with equality. The message here is not that a store was closed for this offence but that this is a precedent for future closings, and perhaps even a complete comic book ban or government approved comic books.

More importantly, at the moment, I'm sure that Michael Correa could use your support. He goes to court on January 23, 1987.

Sincerely,
Bill Harms
202 W. Hoyt
Beatrice, Nebraska 68310

*Bill—Thanks for writing in with your opinion on the unfortunate event that confronted a store manager in the course of his normal duties. While the issue of obscenity and minor children certainly divides everyone, it is important to keep an eye on what progresses. It could indeed prove to be a dangerous situation. And, of course, everyone can sympathize with the plight of Michael.—A saddened Happy Hal*

## A CRITIQUE, IN-DEPTH

Dear Hal,

To start things off, congrats on #50. It was a nice issue. Great idea for a feature article (the future of comics). Stan Lee was probably the most correct on his predictions of three different lines of comics: juvenile, regular and ultra-sophisticated (although I must disagree with the name of the latter. "Adult" would probably be more appropriate. Nudity and sex would probably be a big thing in that and they're not always sophisticated the way they're handled). Jim Steranko's idea about video comics (or would they be called video books, or graphic videos, or...well, you get the idea) is the most revolutionary I've heard. (What was the illustration opposite his interview from?). Both ideas are already coming true in a way. We have Star Comics, Archie Comics, and on the other end, various graphic novels.

Now I'd like to critique (not criticize) the columns:

FEATURE NEWS: Great! I love these tidbits. If you ever drop that, I will discontinue purchasing this magazine. (How's that!) Please do a spotlight on **Shazam!Captain Marvel** since Roy Thomas is in cahoots with all of you (where's that?)

LETTERS: I myself cannot think of any good names. I do like Hollers to Happy Hal and Comments Feature(d) so far. Has the mail been increasing as you begged for? Add me as a semi-regular (if not regular soon) writer. Now all you need is the infamous T.M. Maple from DC to write and you'll have a full crew.

COMICS CONSUMER GUIDE: Another thing that if it's dropped, I'll drop you. *(Enough with the threats already!)* I particularly like the comment/synopsis on **GI Joe vs. Transformers**. Very funny. I laughed for a full five minutes (and it hurt afterward!)

INDEPENDENT LINE: Love the idea, but it seemed too short (because of the long feature article only I hope). It needs to be longer. Column suggestions: Mindy Newell and New Wave; genesis of the infamous dNAgents; Elementals. I do *not* like the shortened consumer guide for the independents. Please expand that also.

FUN & PROFIT: I don't particularly care for, only because I collect because I like to read comics. I don't ever plan on selling mine. However, I would appreciate hints on how to preserve them inexpensively.
SILVER AGE: I like it better than Golden Age because it's closer to my age (how about New Age for the current time period, say 1985 to the year 2000! Everything new is coming out, post-Crisis DC, New Universe, the emergence of competitive independents and fans writing comics like mad!). This month's article was by far the best so far! It's the only article I've read where the duo's claim to authorship isn't the authority. Good analyzing there Will & Gerard! Wwere you detectives in another life?
STRIP SEARCH: Pitch it! I don't care for strips. Make it comedy strips like Berry's World or something.
COMICS 1986: Let's make it a bimonthly regular full of writers' and editors' and artists' editorials! Overall, it was very nice (Even Happy Hal was in there! Wow! It *must* be something then!) *(Yup! You can do that when you're the editor!)*
GOLDEN AGE: I like Roy Thomas' style as an article writer *and* storyteller. I don't know much about the Golden Age, but he's teaching me. I like the fact that he isn't biased to DC heroes.
ANIMATED ANTICS: It's always a pleasure to read about the cartoons I've grown up (and am growing up) with. The best article so far has been the Superpowers one with the season summary.
GAMES: Drops this and I drop you! *(Threats again!)* Any chance of showing how to convert to various game systems? What's the best buy for a superhero game? Why?
HAL'S HOWLINGS: Go ahead! You deserve it you big lug. How about telling us your personal history and how you got involved in comics fanzines? Have you been with CF since #1?
HEROES: None this issue, but I love it. I echo Bill Ranger of Canada. We need a VILLAINS column. Let's go Villains! (ooo...sounds nasty, doesn't it!) *(No sooner asked for then done, next issue and the one after feature a two-part history of the good doctor from Latveria, Doom himself!)*
ARTWORK: I know you have no column on this, but it deserves it's own category for the SCORECARD. (How about REPORT CARD?) Martin Cannon's artwork is nice; I particularly like the three ducks together on the back *(Me too!)* They're really cute (Howard cute? Yes.) Ruth Kennedy's cartoons have been consistently funny. But just *who* or *what* is this grey little animal that pops up everywhere? Please forgive my ignorance, I don't know him (or her).
TITLE PAGE/CONTENTS: This too! Who is Jack Schuster, the resident superhero and why? Any relation, Hal?

I think that's enough, don't you? I used to look at the cover of CF before I bought it, to see if I was interested. Now I don't look at the cover until I get home! Just one final question, will you accept freelance articles and interviews? I feel you might open up to even better unsolicited talent if you do. (Me in particular!)

Yours 'till 100!
Michael J. Pastor III
105 Everglade Drive
Pgh., PA 15235

*Michael—If you want to write for us send me a pitch on a particular piece. We don't often use outside material, unless a columnist misses their deadline, but we'll see. It takes a lot to get me to skip a Thomas, Goulart, Van Hise, Perrin, Benton, Murray or Jones column though!—Happy Hal*

## TURNING AN EDITOR'S HAIR GREY!

Dear Hal,

I have been reading **COMICS FEATURE** for two years now and I must say it is the best mag about comics I have seen yet.

The only complaint I have is Mike Benton's column, he writes like he is the only and absolute authority on comic book collecting. His column seems to pick on the way people collect books and even the books people buy. When I read his column, I almost want to give up my hobby, but at least the rest of the mag is good enough to make me forget his column.

Well, that's all I have to say except that your fiftieth issue was spectacular as usual.

Aaron Smith
242 Helen
Sikeston, MO 63801

Dear Sirs,

I am both pleased and embarrassed to write this letter. Long ago you asked for letters and I sent one. I gave praise to most of your magazine with one exception. I found little use for FUN & PROFIT.

I wish to apologize formally to Mike Benton and emphasize that I was wrong, wrong, wrong.

My complaint after one article was that he was encouraging the low buy/high sell greed rampant in collecting. I was wrong.

Mike's column has since added many great tips on comics. These must be especially valuable to fans and collectors who have no access to specialty shops.

Mike consider this a formal public apology and continue the good job you've been doing.

Your converted fan,
David Schuldt
10J Rt 2
Rantoul, IL 61866

*And on that note I'll sign off till next time!—Confused Hal*

# Comics Consumer Guide

## DC COMICS

►2/10/87

☐ **ANGEL LOVE SPECIAL #1—**
(Slate)

☐ **FLASH #1—**
(LEGENDS spin-off)
(Baron/Guice/Mahlstedt) Wally West returns home to face Vandal Savage.

☐ **FIRESTORM #60—**
(Ostrander/Brozowski/Janke)

☐ **THE JUSTICE LEAGUE #2—**
(Giffen/Maguire/Austin)

☐ **THE OUTSIDERS #20—**
(Direct sales only.) (Barr/Aparo)

☐ **TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #78**
(Reprints TT #19) (Wolfman/Barreto/Tanghal)

☐ **VIGILANTE #42—**
(Direct sales only)(Kupperberg/Smith Burchett) Peacemaker appears.

☐ **WATCHMEN #10—**
(Of 12)(Direct sales only) (Moore/Gibbons) Team of Roschach and Nite Owl reunite.

☐ **WONDER WOMAN #5—**
(Perez & Wein/Perez/Patterson) Death of a god, Earth on the brink of disaster.

►2/17/87

☐ **BATMAN #408—**
(Collins/Warner) Former **COMICS FEATURE** columnist Max Collins takes over the writing chores as Batman loses a partner and finds a new one in Crime Alley.

☐ **BLUE BEETLE #13—**
(Wein/Cullins/Barras) The Beetle and the Titans.

☐ **ELECTRIC WARRIOR #14—**
(Direct sales only) (Moench/Baikie/Adkins)

☐ **LEGION OF SUPERHEROES #35**
(Direct sales only) (Levitz/LaRocque/DeCarlo) Part 4 of 4. Showdown with Universo.

**SECRET ORIGINS #15—**
Deadman—(Helfer/Maguire/Giordano)
Spectre—(Thomas/Gilbert)

☐ **SGT. ROCK #416—**
(Kanigher/Victan)

☐ **STAR TREK #39—**
(Wein/Sutton/Villagran) Harry Mudd is back.

☐ **SUPERMAN #6—**
(Byrne/Kesel) Part 2 of "Host"—Lois possessed.

☐ **YOUNG ALL STARS #1—**
(R&D Thomas/Argondezzi, Bair, Murray/Jones) First issue of **COMICS FEATURE** columnist Roy Thomas' new series.

►2/24/87

☐ **ADV. OF THE OUTSIDERS #46**
(Reprinted from Outsiders #8) (Barr/Duursema)

☐ **ADV. OF SUPERMAN #429—**
(Wolfman/Ordway) Superpowered killers stalk Metropolis.

☐ **BOOSTER GOLD #17—**
(Jurgens/DeCarlo)

☐ **GREEN LANTERN CORPS #213**
(Englehart/Staton/Farmer)

☐ **INFINITY, INC. #39—**
(Direct sales only) (Thomas/Bair/DeZuniga) The full story of Solomon Grundy.

☐ **THE NEW TEEN TITANS #32—**
(Direct sales only) (Levitz/Barreto/Tanghal) A murder weekend for a vacation.

☐ **SHAZAM!THE NEW BEG. #3—**
(R&D Thomas/Mandrake) (Of 4) Black Adam.

☐ **SWAMP THING #61—**
(Moore/Veitch/Alcala) A civilization of intelligent vegetables.

☐ **WARLORD #118—**
(Fleisher/Randall) Warlord and Power Girl.

►3/3/87

☐ **ACTION #589—**
(Byrne/Giordano) With the Green Lanterns.

☐ **CAPTAIN ATOM #4—**
(Bates/Broderick/Smith)

☐ **DETECTIVE COMICS #575—**
(Barr/Davis/Neary) BATMAN: YEAR TWO (1 of 4)

☐ **HAWKMAN #11—**
(Mishkin/Howell/Garzon) The Shadow War is over and the Hawks return to Thanagar.

☐ **MASK #5—**
(Fleisher/Swan/Schaffenberger)

☐ **THE QUESTION #5—**
(Direct sales only) (O'Neil/Cowan/Magyar)

☐ **THE SPECTRE #3—**
(Direct sales only) (Moench/Colan/Mitchell)

☐ **SUICIDE SQUAD #2—**
(Ostrander/McDonnell/Kesel) Squad vs Jihad.

☐ **TALES OF THE LEGION #348—**
(Reprints Legion #23) (Levitz/Lightle/DeCarlo)

**TEEN TITANS SPOTLIGHT #11—**
(Lofficier) The Brotherhood of Evil.



Continued on page 13

# Independent Line

## MORE COMICS FROM BLACKTHORNE

**Shuriken** is a new graphic novel from Blackthorne. The book will reprint the first four issues of the comic plus all new pages and full page illustrations by Reggie Byers, Matt Wagner and others.

Another new publication is **Possibleman!**, written and illustrated by **Nervous Rex** creator William Van Horn. Dexter Smeal is a nothing, a pre-teen gunk who's minding his own business when an alien pod squirts him with mystic black stuff that gives him unbelieveable powers and turns him into a new kind of superhero. The only problem is that when Dexter summons his powers he may not become a force against evil, he may instead find himself transformed into a fire hydrant, a ballerina or just about anything else. Still another new creation is **Danse**, written by Mark Wayne Harris and illustrated by Darrell Goza. Danse is the story of a New York detective. The book is a one-shot.

**Duckbots** is yet another publication from Blackthorne, this one "designed to be a different type of comic," according to editor MacGillivray. "It's a story whose central characters are not good, but evil. In fact, in the first issue they battle the heroic and brave Mr. Wonderful, as they begin their quest towards world domination."

More worth the paper that they are reprinted on come two classic releases featuring, respectively, stories of Kerry Drake by Alfred Andriola, and Betty Boop by Bud Counihan.

## DUURSEMA ON ELRIC

Jan Duursema will join with Roy Thomas to adapt **The Vanishing Tower**, the next installment in the storyline of Elric of Melnibone. Elric, of course, is the sword and sorcery character created by Michael Moorcock. Duursema is known for his work on DC's Arion.

## G.I. JOE WATCH OUT— BORIS THE BEAR IS HERE!

G.I. Joe, the Rilly American Hero, has had it! He's tired of all the fighting and macho posturing and he wants out—of the closet! Unfortunately, the government doesn't want to lose their most "gung-ho" spokesman, and they're willing to do anything to get him back. Is there anyone to whom G.I. Joseph can turn for help? Boris the Bear of course. Written by Mike Richardson, with art by Dean Smith, this Dark Horse should ship in mid-April.

Also scheduled for mid-April is **Dark Horse #6** featuring John Workman's space born heroine, Roma. Also in the issue are Trekker by Ron Randall and Concrete by Paul Chadwick.

## BOOKS LIVE, BOOKS DIE...AT ECLIPSE

The Walt Disney Company's "Captain Eo", a 3-D motion picture space adventure starring Michael Jackson, directed by Francis Ford Coppola and executive produced by George Lucas will be adapted as a 3-D comic book from Eclipse. Art will be by Tom Yeates.

"Some said he was sent from Heaven. Others thought he rose from Hell. Actually, he was from Cincinnati," is how Eclipse describes their new series **Hotspur**, by John Ostrander and Timothy Truman. **Hotspur** will be a three issue mini-series about a stage-combat veteran from modern-day Cincinnati, a young man considered a bit old-fashioned by contemporary theatre standards.

The thirteenth issue of **The New Wave** will be the final installment in the regular series. But it will be followed by a two-part 3-D series featuring a conflict between The New Wave and The Volunteers, a superteam of government agents. Mindy Newell and Gerald Forton handled the creative chores for this Baxter series.

Yet another limited series is the six-part **Lost Planet** written and drawn by Bo Hampton. Publisher Dean Mullaney describes it as "science fiction adventure. It involves missing persons, including some real historical figures, and where they all end up—on this Lost Planet, to which they are somehow instantaneously transported."

How I created...
Captain ELECTRON
BY JAY DISBROW
RIGHT, CAPTAIN E., AND WITHIN A MERE DECADE, ALL OF THIS WILL BE REPLACED BY EVEN MORE SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT

The process involved in creating a new comic book hero is similar to writing a new musical composition. The melody may be beautiful, but only public acceptance will make it a success.

In creating "Captain Electron," I knew I was treading upon ground long venerated by collective fandom. It is common knowledge that the zeal relating to a host of costumed heroes goes all the way back to the Golden Age of comics. Was there room for one more such hero? Did I have something new to offer in this genre? The answer to both questions is an explicit "Yes."

The essential elements we were relying on were (1) a high class product, and (2), the relatively untapped field of Computer Science. I centered this new character directly in the world of Computer Technology. Surprising as it may seem, this has never been done before.

Of course we're all familiar with Radio Shack's "Whiz Kids" comic books, published by Archie (and previously by DC). But these giveaway comics are strictly advertising vehicles. The vaunted **Shatter** comics were also computer-related but only in the sense that the art and lettering for that publication was composed upon an Apple Terminal. Our comic book deals with Computer Science itself. But more than this, it concerns a hero who has been energized by this new technology; a man who is capable of extraordinary feats of physical power, as a result of high-tech experimentation, and application.

Captain Electron is not a "visitor from another planet" who comes to Earth with incredible powers. He is, rather, an ordinary American who has voluntarily surrendered himself to a scientific methodology that results in his achieving tremendous physical strength. At the same time, however, he retains all the qualities that makes a person human.

Comic book readers demand plausibility in the stories they read. They will not accept absurd scientific hypotheses regarding the powers and abilities of their heroes. If the explanations given do not square with known scientific principles, or if a hero fails to conform with the established laws of physics, he is in danger of being laughed out of circulation.

I kept all these principles in mind when I created Captain Electron. Although some who have read issue one of the series may get the impression that this new hero has already fallen into the cauldron of superhero exploits (without an acceptable explanation), please permit me to affirm that such is not the case.

Issue two of the series will be the pivotal point around which the entire series will evolve. That issue will lay out in full detail the manner in which the good Captain acquires his powers. At the outset I determined that if the explanation to be set forth would not stand up to scientific scrutiny, I would scrap the entire project.

To prevent this from happening, I consulted with a number of experts in the field of high technology. An instructor in advanced DPR at Brick provided me with essential data that I used in setting forth the scientific principles behind our hero's power. The same person provided me a reasonable hypothesis for Captain Electron's ability to fly. Taken together, they represent a plausible rationale that I believe will stand the test of investigation. This is not to imply that these theories would work in a real life situation, but at least they have the potential of working.

The Captain possesses a built-in sensor system that is computer controlled. The system is almost paper thin and is constructed in the chest portion of the costume he wears. This, plus his "V-thrust Drive" account for his physical power, and his mobility. But Computer Science is the guiding principle behind the hero's essential being. This aspect of the story was reviewed by the Assistant Director of BCSI who went over the script of the first issue, and made valuable suggestions relating to the technical side of the story.

The artwork on a comic book or a comic strip is unquestionably the most important aspect of the entire effort. It has been said that I draw comics in the style of the 1950s. Strictly speaking, that is not really the case. While I consciously retain the better elements that were prevalent in that era, I combine them with the techniques I developed over the decades. My art styling might be likened to a modern composer who glories in the musical compositions he creates, but who remembers that the source of his talents reside in the great classical traditions of the past.

In drawing comics, the human figure is still the basis upon which the total effort depends. Wallace Wood, Al Williamson, Frank Frazetta and a host of other outstanding comic artists bear testimony to this truth through their art. If an artist possesses the ability to draw figures and props in the proper perspective, and if he can imbue his figures with a sense of life, anything beyond this premise can be described as technique.

In comic art the protagonist must have a demonstrable source of power. This does not mean that every hero must resemble Arnold Schwarzenegger but is reflected in how the hero performs "on camera." How he is projected, the manner in which his action poses are set up. These are what determine quality, and the basic net worth of his comic page layout.

In writing and drawing Captain Electron, I attempt to hold raw sensationalism to a minimum. If I intend to show him smashing through a building, overturning a heavy object, or hurling an enormous weight, I make certain that such instances are kept within the bounds of reason. A display of physical power has its place, but when carried to excess, it loses its ability to enthrall.

## COMICO

- ☐ JONNY QUEST #9—
- ☐ ROBOTECH #14—
- ☐ GRENDEL #6—
- ☐ JUSTICE MACHINE #3—
- ☐ ROBOTECH,NEW GEN. #14

## ECLIPSE

- ☐ ESPERS #4—
- ☐ ALIEN ENCOUNTERS #11
- ☐ LEGION INDEX #3—
- ☐ SCOUT #16—
- ☐ I SAW IT #2—
- ☐ AIRBOY #15—
- ☐ ZOONIVERSE #4—
- ☐ FASHION IN ACTION—
- ☐ THE NEW WAVE #13—
- ☐ LUGER #3—
- ☐ MR. MONSTER #8—
- ☐ ALL-STAR INDEX #1—
- ☐ AIRBOY #16—
- ☐ VILLAINS & VIG. #3—

## FIRST

- ☐ NEXUS #33—
- ☐ BADGER #24—
- ☐ EVANGELINE #2—
- ☐ GHOSTBUSTERS #4—
- ☐ GRIMJACK #35—
- ☐ WHISPER #7—
- ☐ AMERICAN FLAGG! #41—
- ☐ DYNAMO JOE #8—
- ☐ JON SABLE #48—
- ☐ ELRIC #5—
- ☐ SHATTER #9—

## QUALITY

- ☐ SLAINE #1—
- ☐ JUDGE DREDD SPECIAL 1
- ☐ 2000 AD PRESENTS #14
- ☐ JUDGE DREDD #8—
- ☐ ROGUE TROOPER #8—
- ☐ SAM SLADE #8—
- ☐ SPELLBINDERS #6—
- ☐ STRONTIUM DOG #1—

## MISC.

- ☐ GROO #28—
- ☐ ELFQUEST #23—
- ☐ ALIEN LEGION #19—
- ☐ THE COSMIC BOOK #2—
- ☐ ELFLORD #6—
- ☐ DRAGONRING #3—
- ☐ DRAGONFLY #6—
- ☐ FEMFORCE #7—
- ☐ SENT. OF JUSTICE #6—
- ☐ LAFFIN' GAS #6—
- ☐ BLACKTHORNE PREV—
- ☐ ALPHA WAVE #1—
- ☐ DARK ADVENTURES #3—
- ☐ DINOSAUR REX #2—
- ☐ SYPHONS #5—
- ☐ VECTOR #5—
- ☐ STREETFIGHTER #3—
- ☐ COBALT BLUE ALBUM—
- ☐ IMP #1—
- ☐ ETERNITY SMITH #5—
- ☐ THE 3-D ZONE #1—
- ☐ FREAK BROTHERS #10—
- ☐ CHEMICAL MAN #1—
- ☐ SHANGHAI BREEZE #1—
- ☐ TROLLORDS SPECIAL #1
- ☐ MISTER X #10—
- ☐ GI RAMBOT #3—
- ☐ LUNATIC FRINGE #2—
- ☐ POWER FACTOR #2—

FOLLOWING ARE THE SCHEDULED BLACK AND WHITE COMICS TO BE PUBLISHED. NOTE THAT THESE PUBLISHERS` FREQUENTLY DO NOT MEET THEIR PROMISED SCHEDULES AND THAT SOME ANNOUNCED BOOKS NEVER APPEAR AT ALL. ALSO NOTE THAT QUALITY VARIES FROM THE EXCELLENT TO THE UNBEARABLE!

## AMAZING

- ☐ AMAZING PREMIERE #4
- ☐ DOMINO CHANCE #1—
- ☐ EX-MUTANTS #7—
- ☐ NEW HUMANS #2—
- ☐ JACK FROST #2—
- ☐ ROCITI'S REVENGE #1—

## APPLE

- ☐ ELFQUEST #3—
- ☐ FANTASCI #6—
- ☐ SPACE ARK #4—
- ☐ THUNDERBUNNY #10—
- ☐ UNICORN ISLE #6—

## BLACKTHORNE

- ☐ MR. CREAM PUFF #1—
- ☐ ALIEN DUCKLINGS #3—
- ☐ ATOMICMAN #2—
- ☐ CHAMELEON COM. #4—
- ☐ DICK TRACY #10—
- ☐ DUCKBOTS #1—
- ☐ INFANT EARTHS #2—
- ☐ ZOMBIE MORONS #1—
- ☐ GOLDEN FEATURES #7—
- ☐ LABOR FORCE #4—
- ☐ POSSIBLEMAN #1—
- ☐ REVOLVING DOORS #3—
- ☐ ROACHMILL #2—
- ☐ JACKALOPE #7—
- ☐ TERMITES FROM MARS 1
- ☐ PURPLE SNIT #3—
- ☐ WIZARDS #1—

## DARK HORSE

- ☐ BORIS THE BEAR #7—
- ☐ DARK HORSE PRES. #5—
- ☐ STARJONGLEUR COLL #2

## ECLIPSE

- ☐ HAMSTERS #5—
- ☐ CROSSFIRE #9—
- ☐ THE DREAMERY #2—
- ☐ MINI-COMICS #4—
- ☐ GROUNDHOG #2—
- ☐ KITZ N KATZ #5—
- ☐ PORTIA PRINZ #2—
- ☐ REID FLEMING #2—

## ETERNITY

- ☐ GI MUTANTS #1—
- ☐ NINJA #5—
- ☐ DRAGONLORD #3—
- ☐ SHANGHIED #2—

## EXCALIBUR

- ☐ AMER SAMURAI #1
- ☐ DESTINY #1—
- ☐ FACTOR FIVE #1—
- ☐ GI JACKRABBITS 2
- ☐ GORPH #1—
- ☐ LEATHER & LACE 1
- ☐ LUNAR #1—
- ☐ NEW GEN #1—
- ☐ NINJA MASTERS 2
- ☐ ORIENTAL ADV #1
- ☐ PSYCHE #1—
- ☐ VENUTIAN VICE #1

## FANTAGRAPHIC

- ☐ CAPT JACK #8—
- ☐ CRITTERS #13—
- ☐ DOG BOY #3—
- ☐ HONK! #5—
- ☐ JOURNEY: WARDRUMS 1
- ☐ LOVE & ROCKETS #21—
- ☐ MYRON MOUSE #1—
- ☐ PARTICLE DREAMS #4—
- ☐ SINNER #1—
- ☐ THREAT #12—

## KITCHEN SINK

- ☐ ALIEN FIRE #2—
- ☐ DEATH RATTLE #9—
- ☐ SNARF #10—
- ☐ SPIRIT #28—
- ☐ XENOZOIC TALES #1—

## RENEGADE

- ☐ SHERLOCK HOLMES #6—
- ☐ HOLIDAY OUT #2—
- ☐ MS. TREE #37—
- ☐ OPEN SEASON #3—
- ☐ STRATA #6—
- ☐ TRANSIT #1—
- ☐ WORDSMITH #8—

## SILVERWOLF

- ☐ DARK ASSASSIN #1—
- ☐ DRAGON QUEST #2—
- ☐ DUNGEONEERS #5—
- ☐ EDGE #1—
- ☐ THE ERADICATORS #5—
- ☐ FANTASTIC FABLES #1—
- ☐ FAT NINJA #6—
- ☐ GRIPS #5—
- ☐ GUILLOTINE #1—
- ☐ NIGHT MASTER #1—
- ☐ LEGION X.1 #1—
- ☐ PORT #1—
- ☐ REAL GAMES #1—
- ☐ STECH #2—
- ☐ THIEVES #1—
- ☐ VICTIM #1—

## MISC.

- ☐ AMAZING WAHZOO #3—
- ☐ ARSENAL #1—
- ☐ BLACKMOON #5—
- ☐ ESCAPE TO THE STARS 2
- ☐ EVERY EXCUSE #1—
- ☐ KARATE KATZ #1—
- ☐ KENTUCKY FRIED #1—
- ☐ CRIMINALLY INSANE #2
- ☐ LYNX #1—
- ☐ MADMAN #1—
- ☐ MAFIA DROIDS #1—
- ☐ NINJA STRIKE FORCE #1
- ☐ ODD ROMANCE #1—
- ☐ REAGAN'S RAIDERS #4—
- ☐ ROBOSCHMUCK #1—
- ☐ ROCK HEADS #2—
- ☐ SAMURAI FUNNIES #3—
- ☐ THUNDER #2—
- ☐ PUMA BLUES #4—
- ☐ CEREBUS #95—
- ☐ A.C.E. COMICS PRES #1
- ☐ ADV SPENCER SPOOK #5
- ☐ RETURN OF SKYMAN #1
- ☐ ADVENTURERS #5
- ☐ ELF WARRIOR #1—
- ☐ NINJA ELITE #1—
- ☐ SAMURAI #15—
- ☐ STARK:FUTURE #9—
- ☐ WARLOCK FIVE #4—
- ☐ NINJA HIGH SCHOOL #2
- ☐ KWAR #1—
- ☐ SYSTEM SEVEN #1—
- ☐ TALES ANIVERSE #6—
- ☐ TIME THIEVES #2—
- ☐ DEATHBRINGER #2—
- ☐ EPSILON WAVE #2—
- ☐ DELTA TENN #1—
- ☐ MAN FROM UNCLE #2—
- ☐ FISH POLICE #7—
- ☐ PENGUIN & PENCILGUIN 2
- ☐ GOODIES #33—
- ☐ STUFF #1—
- ☐ MANAGERIE #1—
- ☐ SNOWBUNI #1—
- ☐ CYBERCOM #1—
- ☐ DRAGON'S STAR #2—
- ☐ GAIJIN #1—
- ☐ THE JAM #1—
- ☐ BADE BIKER #3—
- ☐ TURTLES #10—
- ☐ DELIRIUM #1—
- ☐ MATT CHAMPION #1—
- ☐ COSMOS #2—
- ☐ ILIAD II #4—
- ☐ DRAGON WORLD #1—
- ☐ LOADED #1—
- ☐ POWERPLAY #2—
- ☐ THE PROTECTORS #3—
- ☐ VIET NINJA #1—
- ☐ THE WASHMAN—
- ☐ PRIME SLIME #5—
- ☐ RALPH SNART #5—
- ☐ THE BOOGIEMAN #2—
- ☐ WHISPERS&SHADOWS 9
- ☐ ULTRA KLUTZ #8—
- ☐ OZONE #1—
- ☐ ADV THEOWN #3—
- ☐ CYBERHAWKS #1—
- ☐ RIP OFF COMIX #13—
- ☐ SHADOWLOCK #1—
- ☐ BARABBAS #4—
- ☐ DR RADIUM #4—
- ☐ ADV RICK RAYGUN #7—
- ☐ SAX & CO #1—
- ☐ TO BE ANNOUNCED #6—
- ☐ SPLAT! #1—
- ☐ GANTAR #2—
- ☐ MIDNITE SKULKER #5—
- ☐ KAPT KEEN & CO #2—
- ☐ SAVAGE HENRY #2—
- ☐ VORTEX #13—
- ☐ ADAM & EVE #9—
- ☐ ADV BOC #2—
- ☐ BOFFO LAFFS #6—
- ☐ PANDA KAHN #1—
- ☐ CRIMSON DREAMS #11—
- ☐ DARERAT/TADPOLE #1—
- ☐ DEMON'S BLOOD #2—
- ☐ EAGLE #3—
- ☐ THE FOTON EFFECT #1—
- ☐ FRAGMENTS #3—
- ☐ GOON PATROL #1—
- ☐ GNOSIS BRIDGE #1—
- ☐ HONOR AMONG THIEVES
- ☐ LUGH #2—
- ☐ MEGATON #8—
- ☐ MURDER #1—
- ☐ NETHERWORLDS #2—
- ☐ NEW REALITY #6—
- ☐ NOMADS ANTIQUITY #1
- ☐ NO MONSTERS #5—
- ☐ OIL MAN #1—
- ☐ RENEGADE RABBIT #2—
- ☐ SHADOWLORD #1—
- ☐ SIDE SHOW #1—
- ☐ 39 SCREAMS #6—
- ☐ THRESHOLD REALITY #3
- ☐ TIGERS OF TERRA #1—
- ☐ TIME OUT OF MIND #4
- ☐ WILD THINK #1—
- ☐ WINGING IT #1—
- ☐ WIZARD OF TIME #5—
- ☐ WRONG COMIC #2—
- ☐ ZOLASTRAYA&BARD #2

# Comics Consumer G

CONTD.

## MARVEL

►2/3/87

☐ **DAREDEVIL #243—**
(Nocenti/Williams/Williamson)

☐ **NEW MUTANTS #52—**
(Claremont/Leonardi/Green) The New Mutants are grounded by Magneto.

☐ **NIGHT MASK #8—**
(Goodwin/Giffen) Guest starring Justice.

☐ **PSI FORCE #8—**
(Fingeroth/Texeira) Alcatraz!

☐ **STRIKEFORCE: MORITURI #7**
(Gillis/Anderson/Williams)

☐ **WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #27—**
(Zimmerman/Simons) The Headhunter.

☐ **WEST COAST AVENGERS #21**
(Englehart/Milgrom/Sinnott) Part 5 of 7. Guest stars Moon Knight and the villainous Rama Tut. Moon Knight is scheduled to join

☐ **COMET MAN #5—**
(Of 6) (Mumy & Ferrer/Jones/Talaoc) Guest stars FF and the debut of Comet Boy.

☐ **G.I. JOE SPECIAL MISSIONS #5**
(Hama/Trimpe) Aerial action.

☐ **AVENGERS VS X-MEN #3—**
(Of4) (Stern/Silvestri/Rubinstein)

►2/10/87

☐ **ALPHA FLIGHT #47—**
(Mantlo/Brasfield & Mignola/Portacio)

☐ **CAPTAIN AMERICA #330—**
(Gruenwald/Morgan) Intro Night Shift, a team of villains composed of The Werewolf, Tatterdemalion, Gypsy Moth, the Brothers Grimm, the Needle, Tick Tock, Dansen Macabre and Digger.

☐ **FALLEN ANGELS #3—**
(Of 8) (Duffy/Severin/Palmer) Guest starring X-Factor. Origin of Gomi and his mutant lobsters. Intro Boom Boom.

☐ **KICKERS, INC. #8—**

☐ **MERC #8—**
(Murray/Morrow)

☐ **STRANGE TALES #3—**
(Dr. Strange—(Gillis/Emberlin/Warner) Cloak & Dagger—(Mantlo/Blevins)

☐ **POWER PACK #30—**
(Direct sales only) (L. Simonson/Mayerik/Barta)

☐ **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #289**
(David/Morgan & Kupperberg/Fern) Double-sized conclusion to war. Revelation of Hobgoblin, fate of Flash Thompson. Guest starring Kingpin, Foreigner and Black Cat.

☐ **MEPHISTO VS FOUR HEROES #3**
(Of 4) (Milgrom/J. Buscema/Wiacek) The X-Men.

☐ **STAR COMICS DIGEST #4—**

☐ **SAVAGE SWORD #136—**
(Black and white) (Yakata/A. Kubert)Piracy.

►2/17/87

☐ **MARVEL AGE #51—**

☐ **AVENGERS #280—**
(Stern/J. Buscema/Palmer) Avengers battle the gods of Olympus.

☐ **D.P. 7 #8—**
(Gruenwald/Ryan/Tanghal)

☐ **INCREDIBLE HULK #332—**
(David/McFarlane/McLeod) Conclusion of Rick Jones as Hulk storyline and intro of more savage Leader.

☐ **JUSTICE #8—**
(Thomas/Isherwood) Justice on the run.

☐ **THE 'NAM #7—**
(Murray/Golden) Operation: Cedar Falls.

☐ **THE SILVER SURFER #2—**

☐ **X-MEN #218—**
(Claremont/Silvestri/Green) The Juggernaut.

☐ **CONAN #195—**
(Owsley/Semeiks/Isherwood)

☐ **G.I. JOE #60—**
(Hama/McFarlane) Zanzibar, the Dreadnok Pirate.

☐ **MARVEL SAGA #19—**

☐ **MARVEL TALES #200—**
(Reprints Marvel Team-Up Annual) (O'Neil/Miller) Guest starring Drs. Strange & Doom.

☐ **DAREDEVIL GRAPHIC NOVEL—**

►2/24/87

☐ **FANTASTIC FOUR #303—**
(Thomas/J. & S. Buscema)

☐ **IRON MAN #219—**
(Michelinie/Layton) Part 1 of 3 as a new villain, the Ghost, attempts to acquire S.E.'s newest buy, Accutech.

☐ **PETER PARKER #127—**
(Layton/Fern) Kingpin and Hobgoblin.

☐ **SPITFIRE #9—**
(Bates/Giarrano/DeZuniga)

☐ **STAR BRAND #9—**
(Chase/Leonardi)

☐ **THOR #380—**
(W. Simonson/S. Buscema) Thor battles the Midgard Serpent in splash pages.

☐ **X-FACTOR #17—**
(L. Simonson/W. Simonson) Funeral of Angel?

☐ **CLASSIC X-MEN #10—**

☐ **TRANSFORMERS #29—**
(Budiansky/Perlin/Akin & Garvey) Intro Scraplets. Guest starring Triplechangers.

☐ **G.I. JOE DIGEST #4—**
(Reprints GI Joe #9-11)

☐ **MARVEL UNIV HANDBK #16—**
History of Marvel's dead characters.

☐ **CLASSIC CONAN #1—**
(Black and white) (Thomas/Windsor-Smith) Reprints Conan stories from first issues of comic.

# LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE™

BY ROY THOMAS

# THE MARVEL FAMILY

© 1985 DC Comics

One dark night in 1940, a lonely newsboy stood on a corner, hawking his journalistic wares. It was late, and not a soul remained on the street to buy a newspaper. Suddenly, he heard a "Hist!" from the shadows. Turning in surprise, the newsboy spotted a mysterious dark-clad figure beckoning to him from the entrance of an abandoned subway. His curiosity thoroughly aroused, he followed the sinister shape into the subway.

## ORIGINS

Inside, he found himself in a dark passageway lined with grotesque sculptures representing the Seven Deadly Sins: Lust, Envy, Greed, *et al*. Further on, the passageway opened into a large room in the center of which stood a marble throne. Seated on the throne was a bearded patriarchal figure in a long flowing mantle. Over the man's head, though the newsboy did not notice it at once, was a large stone block suspended by a single thin strand.

Abruptly belying his statue-like appearance, the robed figure spoke, informing the newsboy Billy Batson that he was SHAZAM, a wizard from the Egypt of 3,000 B.C. Billy had been summoned, he learned, to be given miraculous powers in the service of humanity.

"Billy Batson, speak my name!" the youth was ordered.

"Shazam!" Billy obliged, and immediately the most unrealistic lightning ever to appear in a comicbook transformed him into a sort of muscular Fred MacMurray, dressed in a red suit trimmed in gold (or yellow, if you will), complete with a lightning-bolt insignia on his chest and a short white and gold cape.

A moment later, the thin strand supporting the stone over Shazam's head snapped in a pre-ordained manner and splat! — no more wizard!

And so Captain Marvel was born.

It cannot truly be said that he was the most invincible superhero ever invented. Superman, the adventure character that Cap alternately imitated and parodied, was at least as powerful and later became even more so, since Kryptonite (whether of one color or 37) was a relatively late creation. And then there was the Spectre, whose powers — as Jim Harmon once wrote — were roughly equal to those of God.

Perhaps a better comparison than either of these is available in today's Thor, whose powers are great but indeterminate. The Mighty One, also, utilizes magic lightning of dubious realism to turn from human to superhuman. Thor is, as everybody knows, the Norse god of thunder; Captain Marvel got his powers from the name of Shazam, an anagram composed of the initials of various gods and heroes of Greco-Roman mythology, with Solomon tossed in for good measure.

Cap was a strong contender for the title of "Earth's Mightiest Mortal," as he was so often called. The Spectre was a ghost and therefore not a mortal, Superman and the Martian Manhunter are both aliens, of course. In another

sense, Cap became the World's Mightiest *Seller*, also. Quickly outgrowing his mere cover-feature status in **Whiz Comics**, Captain Marvel branched out in 1941 into his own monthly magazine. (For a short time in the middle 40s, **Captain Marvel Adventures** was even a biweekly. And, of course, there was the Republic serial....)

## MEET THE FAMILY

An equally significant facet of Cap's tremendous growth in popularity was his fantastic progeny. The Big Red Cheese proved to be such a gold-mine to Fawcett Publications that he was almost immediately cut into several profitable slices.

The best of these occurred in **Whiz** #25, when a villain named Captain *Nazi* permanently crippled and almost killed another poor newsboy, one Freddy *Freeman*. (Symbolism, anyone?) Captain Marvel saved the lad and took him before old Shazam's spirit, which could be conjured up at any time simply by lighting a torch next to his vacant throne. Shazam told Cap that he would give the boy powers comparable to those of the Mighty Mortal himself.

On awakening, the boy saw Captain Marvel standing near him. Gasping out the superhero's name in surprise, Freddy was turned by magic lightning into Captain Marvel Jr., a blue-clad counterpart of Cap. Unlike the original Marvel, however, Junior remained a *teenager*, identical in facial features to the newsboy he had been. Evidently Junior didn't have as much on the ball as his mentor; while Billy Batson rose quickly from newsboy to radio newscaster, Freddy Freeman remained to the end of his teenage days at the corner newsstand, yelling "Extry, extry!"

Junior was not the only spiritual offspring of Captain Marvel, however. Indeed, as has been observed before, almost all the Super characters later introduced by National Comics were done years earlier by Editor Wendell Crowley's similarly inventive associates, namely artist C.C. Beck and writer Otto Binder. Just as Superboy was preceded by Captain Marvel Jr., so did Cap Sr. gain a sister long before cousin Supergirl was even a twinkle in Mort Weisinger's eager eye.

In her origin in **Captain Marvel** #18, a dying nurse informed Billy Batson that he had a long-lost twin sister, and he immediately launched a nationwide search for her. As it turned out, she was much nearer at hand than he suspected — a quiz-kid on a radio show at his own Station WHIZ, as a matter of fact. He found her just in time, too. Later in the story Billy and Freddy were knocked unconscious by criminals holding Mary for ransom, and in consternation she cried out: "Billy! Freddy! Speak your magic words! Oh, they can't! They're gagged! Billy can't say SHAZAM....!"

BOOM! ZAP! Instantly, in Mary Batson's place stood Mary Marvel, identical in physical appearance to her

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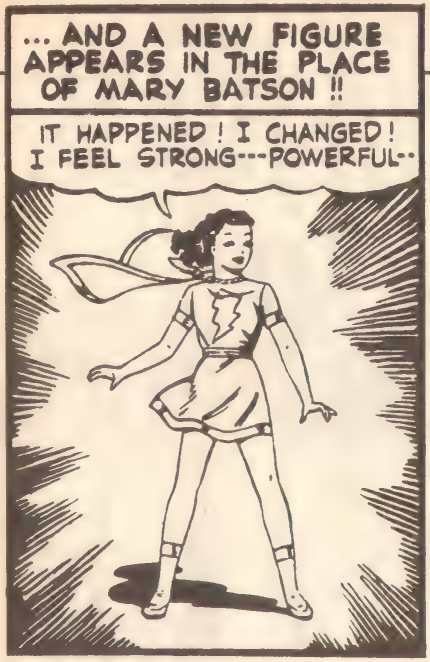


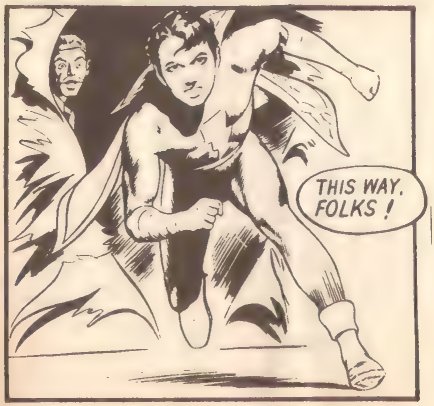


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predecessor but garbed in a short-skirted version of Capt. Marvel's famed costume.

The new Miss Marvel was understandably upset about the treatment of her brother and his friend, and dealt one of the crooks a gentle slap — which sent him reeling twenty feet against a wall. While she stopped momentarily to admire the lovely outfit she was so suddenly wearing, another felon smashed a chair over her pretty head — ineffectually, of course.

The crooks' last resort was guns, and Mary squealed in terror as the remaining kidnappers opened fire on her. But naturally the bullets bounced off. Beginning to realize the extent of her powers, she smashed the two remaining crooks and freed Billy and Freddy.

Later, Shazam's spirit explained that, because she was Billy's twin, the power of changing into a superbeing was inherint within her as well. This makes no logical sense, of course, since Billy's own power was only a relatively recent gift from the late Egyptian mage; but this was in those happy, carefree days before editorial footnotes and "explanations" for every use of a hero's power. After all, Cap and his brood were magical, not logical.

At any rate, logical or not, Mary Marvel at once zoomed from this issue of **Capt. Marvel Adventures** to join Batman-type Mr. Scarlet in **Wow #9** where she would continue to appear for years. To poor Scarlet she must have been about as welcome as a bath in red ink remover, for she immediately knocked him off the cover of that magazine. And of course she and Junior both had their own comics ere long, Junior in 1942 and Mary in 1943. (Jr. was also in **Master.**)

## HUMOROUS SIDEKICKS

After that you would think that old Shazam had virtually subdivided his powers into nothingness, but not so. One day, after Billy's regular radio broadcast, three more Billy Batsons showed up — Tall Billy, Fat Billy and Hill Billy. In this adventure (**Whiz #21**) all four were captured and tied to a log pointed at an unfriendly buzzsaw. In order to yell above the noise of the saw (a problem that didn't bother him in subsequent tales), our Billy Batson had his three new friends shout "Shazam!" with him. Result: they too were tranformed into adult superbeings — Lieutenants Marvel or the Squadron of Justice, as they alternately called themselves.

Enough? Uh-uh. Fawcett also planned to start a Disney-type comic entitled **Funny Animals.** Its cover feature? "Hoppy the Marvel Bunny," what else? It seems that this little rabbit was sitting under a tree one day, kiddies, and this mean bully was trying to steal his girl friend. Reading an issue of **Captin Marvel,** he remarked wistfully that he wished *he* could become strong just by saying "Shazam!"

BOOM! ZAP! Another member of what could have justifiably been called the Merry Marvel Bullpen was born! From that time on, no Nazi funny-animal was safe! Hoppy,

KEEP IT UP ALL DAY IF YOU LIKE! I DON'T FEEL A THING!
BUT EVEN THE MIGHTY MARVEL FAMILY IS UNABLE TO DEFEAT BLACK ADAM!
© 1985 DC Comics

too, got his own comic, but not till much later and then not for very long. And, in one memorable if especially unrealistic tale, he and Mary Marvel teamed up in an other-dimension adventure.

There were a couple of non-super Marvels along the line, too. Billy's Uncle Dudley, who first appeared in **Captain Marvel #**54, claimed to share the powers of his nephew and niece and would shout "Shazam" while struggling out of his street clothes to stand decked out in a poor man's version of Cap's uniform. The others liked "Uncle Marvel," however, and pretended to believe he had powers like their own. He generally "flew" by clinging tenaciously to Captain Marvel's cape. A teenage girl named Freckles appointed herself the cousin of Mary Marvel, also, but didn't claim extra powers because of it.

## THE MARVEL VILLAINS

A few *villains* followed the Shazam tradition as well. There was Levram, which is "Marvel" spelled backwards. And in **Captain Marvel #**8 a milquetoast crook named Stinky Printwhistle was given by Lucifer the power to pronounce the initials of Ivan (the Terrible), Borgia, Attila and Caligula and become IBAC, a muscular do-badder.

The most memorable of the Marvel *crooks*, however, appeared in December of 1945, when the first issue of **Marvel Family Comics** appeared. That first beautiful cover (and the stories inside as well) featured Cap, Junior, Mary, Uncle Marvel and Shazam himself — or at least his never-say-die spirit.

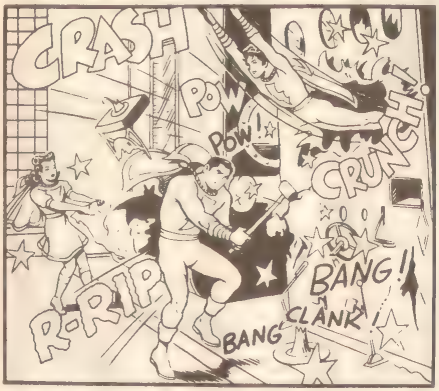
It seems that 5000 years before, in Egypt, old Shazam (who was probably *never* young) had decided to pass on some of his power to supposedly worthy Teth-Adam. The venerable sorcerer called the selectee before him and commanded him to pronounce his name (something that is still disputed among Captain Marvel fans). Upon doing so, Teth-Adam instantly became Mighty Adam, who was dressed in a black-and-gold, capeless edition of Cap's suit.

The color *black* proved to be rather prophetic. Either Shazam was wrong from the start about the purity of soul of Teth-Adam or else in old Egypt power corrupted more quickly than it does today, because Mighty Adam immediately raced to the pharaoh's palace, broke the royal neck and proclaimed himself ruler of the land.

He was destined for a short reign, however. Appearing

before the new pharaoh and addressing him now as Black Adam (the name that finally stuck), Shazam proclaimed that, although he could not destroy the receiver of so many of his powers, he *could* still banish him to the farthest star, which he proceeded to do. At once Black Adam was hurled far out into space; it took him 5000 years to get back.

When he finally arrived, he found Cap, Junior and Mary unable to stop his rampage of terror. It was a stalemate. However, while the other three Marvels tried their luck with

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Black Adam, Uncle Marvel tried a more laudable approach — that of using his head. He lit the magic torch that summoned the spirit of Shazam. The late wizard advised Dudley to get the evil Marvel to say the magic word, which would defeat him.

Quickly, Uncle Marvel threw himself into the fray between Black Adam and the confused Marvel Family (as they were now officially known). "Stop, kids," he shouted. "He's so strong, let's make him a member of the Marvel Family. After all, he got his powers from old Mazham. I mean...Hamshaz. No, I mean Shmhaz...er, uh...."

"You sputtering old fool," sneered Black Adam. "You mean *Shazam*!"

BOOM! ZAP! The magic lightning turned the evil one back into Teth-Adam, whom Captain Marvel instantly clobbered. Moments later the unconscious Teth-Adam crumbled into dust (After all, he *was* 5000 years old.)

## MARVEL FAMILY

**Marvel Family Comics** #1 was the first of a quite successful series, declared to be a monthly from the start. However, issue #1 was dated December 1945, and #2 didn't appear until June 1946. The first issue contained 36 pages featuring the origin tale, if such it can be called. In another story the Marvel Family temporarily adopted a "Baby Marvel" who was left on Billy Batson's doorstep.

Unfortunately, **Marvel Family Comics** #2 did not quite live up to the promise of the first fine issue. It featured only one Marvel Family tale, a rather short one which covered a "family reunion" of the original four members with the Lts. Marvel thrown in. The other stories in the issue were individual adventures of Cap, Junior and Mary. Similar stories could be seen in any of the half dozen other comics starring these three characters.

The issue, regrettably, set the pace for the next several years, so that the most interesting thing about the most early **Marvel Family** comics was the back cover, featuring Marvel items for sale. For prices ranging from 10 cents to 50 cents, Fawcett offered readers Captain Marvel felt hats, magic folders, pennants, statuettes, felt emblems and an overseas cap. If you preferred Junior, there was a felt emblem which pictured him instead of Cap. And the girl readers could send off for Mary Marvel novelty pins and — you guessed it — felt emblems. You got a free Captain Marvel pencil clip with your order, too.

The back of #3 pushed Marvel Family games, featuring eight items (a $2.10 value, the reader was assured) for $1. This set of items included tattoo transfers, a Shazam game, and various other items, and you got a magic lightning box, comic clock, Captain Marvel magic eyes (whatever *they* were!), C.M. buzz bombs and iron-ons of Cap and other Fawcett heroes such as Spy Smasher for free. And don't we all wish we had *them* today!

## MY PERSONAL FAVORITE

There were a number of goodies between the covers as well. This writer's personal favorite is the tenth issue of the **Marvel Family** (as the comic was called starting with issue #3).

It featured an action-packed cover in which Cap, Mary and Junior were slugging it out with their most consistent and malevolent foes, the SIVANA FAMILY, united together for the first time. Old Thaddeus Budog Sivana himself, the self-styled World's Maddest Scientist, was more or less a deliberate Fu Manchu type at the start (as writer Binder himself has admitted) who appeared in the very first Captain Marvel story. He was easily the most popular of Cap's many intriguing foes.

When success caused Cap to be amoebaed into several subsidiary characters, Sivana followed suit, and out of nowhere appeared his equally evil and equally buck-toothed progeny, Junior Sivana and Georgia Sivana.

In regards to the latter, however, it should perhaps be stated here that she was not the *first* daughter of Sivana. There was another, earlier child, Beautia, who appeared in some of the very early **Whiz** tales and who fell in love with Captain Marvel. The lovely black sheep of the Sivana clan was dropped after a few stories. Georgia herself, as was explained when she first appeared in **Mary Marvel** #1, spent all her early life on the planet Venus. *Why* I don't know.

Part of my interest in the story in **Marvel Family** #10 ("The Sivana Family Strikes at the Marvel Family") lies in the fact that its basic format is similar to that of the famed Justice Society tales. There is an introductory chapter in which the Marvels (and the Sivanas as well) appear together, then a separate chapter for each of the three major members, and of course a slam-bang let's-get-together-and-polish-'em-off ending.

This 1947 tale of tales began with a scene from the famous Marvel Family television show, a round-table affair presided over by Uncle Marvel (who was, incidentally, appearing in his last issue of **Marvel Family**). Watching the program from his floating laboratory was Dr. Sivana himself, who had decided it was time for *his* family to join forces likewise. He had built a giant machine which he was convinced would utterly destroy the Marvels forever, but no further work could be done on it until he and the kids could measure the voltage of the Shazam lightning.

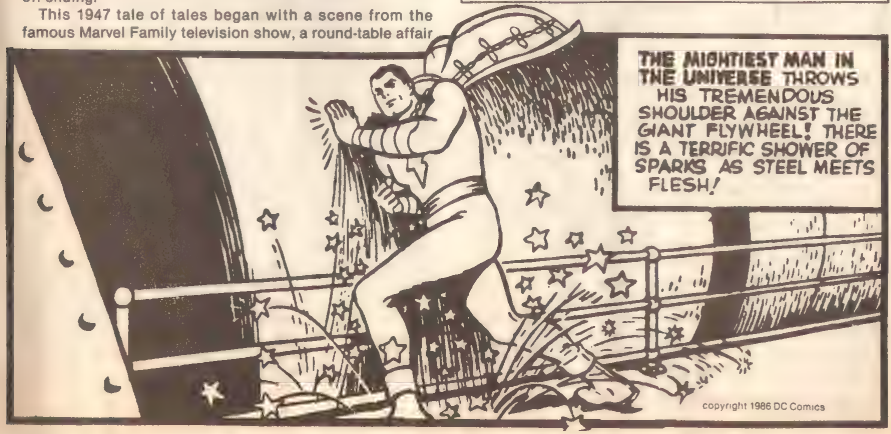
Accordingly, the next day the three Sivanas let themselves be seen on the roof of Station WHIZ, and moments later Billy, Mary and Freddy said the magic words which turned them into the Cheeses. (It was Sivana, by the way, who invented and popularized Captain Marvel's most persistent nickname through the years, the Big Red Cheese.)

As the enchanted lightning-bolts thundered down from the heavens, however, they proved to be so powerful they exploded Sivana's meter. He and his offspring were forced to use a smokescreen to escape from the Marvels. (Well, what could Thaddeus expect, anyhow? The meter had only been designed to measure 6,000,000,000,000,000,000 mega-volts!)

At this point Junior came to the aid of his insidious papa with an old manuscript from ancient Atlantis which mentioned an element named Protium. Patterned after uranium, this fictitious element took 10,000 years to turn into Neutrium, and 10,000 more to become Electrium. A bomb in which these three elements were combined, Sivana thought, would give him the power he needed for his mysterious Marvel-mashing machine.

**MORE MARVELS NEXT ISSUE!**

**ROY THOMAS writes/edits All-Star, Infinity Inc. and Secret Origins for DC and Elric for First. Previously he introduced both Star Wars and Conan to Marvel where he also served as Editor-in-Chief.**


THE MIGHTIEST MAN IN THE UNIVERSE THROWS HIS TREMENDOUS SHOULDER AGAINST THE GIANT FLYWHEEL! THERE IS A TERRIFIC SHOWER OF SPARKS AS STEEL MEETS FLESH!
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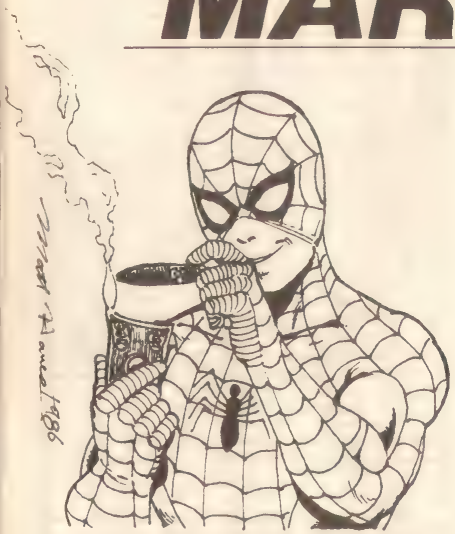
# FUN & PROFIT™

BY MIKE BENTON

# INVE$TING IN MARVELS



## INVESTING IN COMICS: THE BASIC RULES

More money is made on Marvels than any other comics in the world.

That's really no surprise. Marvel collectors account for over half of all new *and* back-issues sold. Just about every collector has at least one Marvel title they would like to complete.

So you could say that Marvel comics are sort of like blue chip stocks. They are steady performers with low risks for the long-term investor. As long as there are comic collectors, there will be Marvel comic collectors.

Still, it's not all that easy to make money by collecting Marvel comics. Every comic book dealer worth his Price Guide knows to the buck what an old Marvel comic should sell for. Bargains are indeed hard to find if you collect early Marvels.

Mark these words, however: There are still some great Marvel comics that are waiting for your investment dollar.

Before getting down to specifics and investment suggestions for Marvel comics, let's look at investing in general.

**First, collectors should only consider comics which are no less than three to five years old as *investment* comics.** A comic must have a history in the marketplace before you can gauge its investment potential.

Recent comics from the past three years or so are still finding their level in the back issue market. While you can make a real killing by buying recent back issues, you can just as easily (or easier!) *lose* money quick by speculating in recent comics.

Investing in proven back issues, on the other hand, means that you can be fairly assured of a partial, if not full and generous, return on your money.

The wise and careful investor will therefore wait a few years before committing *large* amounts of money to *specific* back issues.

For this reason, we will consider only Marvel comics that are at least five years old for investment purposes.

**Second, for a comic to be a good and healthy investment, it must have the potential for above average growth.**

Traditionally, the best growth patterns for back issue comics occur in books priced at $5 to $15. Why? Because books in this price range indicate that: (1) There is an obvious collector's interest and collectibility associated with the book, otherwise it would not have achieved this moderate back issue price, and (2) There is room for the price to increase $25 to $50. Above this price range, back issue comics start to encounter resistance and a decreased demand from collectors.

So for these reasons, this column is a guide to the best Marvel comic investments from 1961 to 1982 which are currently worth between $5 to $20 or so in Fine to Mint condition.

Got that? We won't be looking at the recent Marvels from the past five years, and we won't be considering any back issue Marvels which are either priced below $5 or above $20 in investment condition (Fine to Mint).

Even with all these restrictions, there are still dozens of great Marvel comics that a serious investor should consider buying Let's take a tour by title.

SEARS STOCK
AT&T STOCK
MACDONALDS STOCK
MARVEL SUPER-HEROES
SPECTACULAR
ACTION IN THE MYSTERIOUS MARVEL MANNER!

**AVENGERS** — If there was only one Marvel title I could collect, this is my choice. No other Marvel comic has had the consistency of quality nor the variety of talent as the **Avengers**. Unfortunately, for the investor this also means that all the hot books are locked up. The first ten issues are out of reach for many collectors, especially #4 which is ranked as one of the most valuable Marvels.

Still, there are some good issues of **The Avengers** that are still bargains. Issues 57 and 58, with the origin of the Vision, are high points, as are issues 98-100, with Barry Smith art and great stories. Still "undiscovered" are issues 69-97, which featured the best Thomas-Buscema stories we are likely to see.

**DAREDEVIL** — Again, the first six or so issues are dynamite, but so are the prices. By now, we all know that the Miller issues, especially the Elektra appearances, are a good place to sock your money. Other than these, however, real deals are where you can make them.

**FANTASTIC FOUR** — If someone asked me to pick the best comic books that Kirby and Lee produced for Marvel, I would point to issues 36 and 67 of this title. Never since have so many dynamic characters and concepts been introduced into one story-line. The early issues have charm, the later issues have grace, but these 32 issues have got what it takes! By all means, get yourself a run of these numbers if you want to invest in Marvels with a good growth potential.

**SPIDER-MAN** — Everybody's favorite character, or just about. Buying **Spider-Man** back issues is like buying real estate with highway frontage — sooner or later, someone is going to pay you more than you spent. Even so, you will have to shop smart to find the best investment bargains.

Issues 31 through 40 are good choices, with issues 31 to 33 a must series. An excellent run to try to complete *right now* are issues 121 to 150, which is Spider-Man at his post-Ditko peak.

**X-MEN** — A real challenge; how can you find a nugget in a gold mine that has been dug out by every speculator this side of ten years old? Well, believe it or not, there are a *few* **X-Men** issues that are overlooked or underpriced.

For starters, grab issues 11 through 17 with Kirby layouts and art. The only other X-Men related title that is underpriced is the 1979-1981 **Amazing Adventures** series from Marvel, which reprints the first few original **X-Men** issues.

**OTHER MARVEL TITLES** — Most of the other Marvel bargains are scattered among a dozen titles. Without rhyme or reason, here are some additional suggestions:

**CAPTAIN MARVEL** — Issues 25 to 33 by Jim Starlin.
**STRANGE TALES** — Issues 126 to 146, with Ditko's Dr. Strange and the new Nick Fury, Agent of Shield.

**TALES OF SUSPENCE** — Issues 52 (First Black Widow), 57 (First Hawkeye) and 58 (Captain America begins).

**JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY** — Issues 101 to 125 contain some of Kirby's finest work.

**CONAN** — Issues 14 to 15 (Elric), and 23 to 24 (First Red Sonja) are classics.

**AMAZING ADVENTURES** — The second series (1970 to 1976) has a great Roy Thomas/Neal Adams sequence (issues 5 to 8), while issues 11 to 16 have a Beast series that X-Men fans will eventually discover.

There now — that should get you started. Remember that I'm only touching on highpoints here. There are still dozens and dozens of other Marvel investment brgains that I have left out by chance or design.

Still, these examples should show you *how* to spot a good investment comic, whether it be a recent Marvel or a Golden Age DC comic.

If you're interested, we can take an investment tour of DC comics or another company in the future.

Until then, buy-buy. **CF**

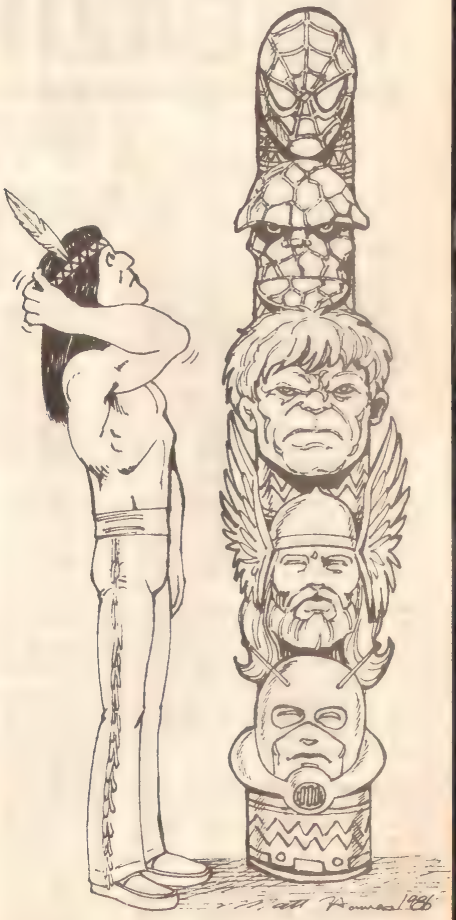
**MIKE BENTON is the author of Comic Book Collecting for Fun and Profit and a leading expert on investments in rare comic books.**

# THE 35 VALUABLE MARVEL COMIC BOOKS

(COMPILED BY MIKE BENTON)

**Amazing Fantasy** #15 (First Spider-Man)
**Fantastic Four** #1
**Spider—Man** #1
**Hulk** #1
**Fantastic Four** #2
**Journey Into Mystery** #83 (First Thor)
**Tales To Atonish** #27 (First Ant-Man)
**X-Men** #1
**Avengers** #1
**Fantastic Four** #3
**Tales of Suspense** #39 (First Iron Man)
**Spider—Man** #2
**Fantastic Four** #4
**Hulk** #2
**Daredevil** #1
**Fantastic Four** #5
**Spider-Man** #3
**X-Men** #2
**Avengers** #4 (Return of Captain America)
**Tales To Astonish** #35 (Second Ant-Man)
**Hulk** #3
**Spider-Man** #4
**Avengers** #2
**Tales of Suspense** #40 (Second Iron Man)
**Fantastic Four** #6
**Fantastic Four** #7
**Fantastic Four** #8
**Fantastic Four** #9
**Fantastic Four** #10
**Spider-Man** #5
**Spider—Man** #6
**Hulk** #4
**Hulk** #5
**Hulk** #6
**X-Men** #94

(Note: As of late 1986, all comics on this list were worth over $100 in MINT condition. There were over 100 additional Marvel comics worth between $50 and $100 in MINT condition which do not appear on this list. — M. Benton)



# WARS LARGE AND SMALL & THE NAM -AND- MERC

BY JOHN PEEL

For almost thirty years now, since the start of the Silver Age of Comics, the superhero has reigned supreme. Virtually no comic book with any theme other than costumed heroes has stood any kind of chance of success since the Sixties began. Now, for the first time, it looks as though this trend may be changing — in favor of the war comic.

War comics have not fared well for decades. Marvel's efforts, notably **Sergeant Fury and His Howling Commandoes**, staggered on for a while in the initial creative flurry of the early Marvel Age. Over at DC, such titles as **Sergeant Rock** have somehow hung in, even without great sales. Fallen by the way are more attempts at war comics than we can list, including the recently terminated **GI Combat**. Yet, suddenly, it looks as if the two top-selling comic titles both deal with warfare. Right at the top is the phenomenally successful **GI Joe** — as any of you with small relatives will know, this comic character is part of an amazing amount of merchandising and is one of the hottest Christmas gift items even as I write this article.

## SURPRISE/SUCCESS

The other comic is a relative new comer, **The Nam**. Dealing with one of the most unpopular wars of the century, this comic is gritty and realistic in a way few war books have ever tried to be. It unashamedly relates historical fact through the medium of fictional characters, selling around half a million copies per issue. In **COMICS FEATURE** #47 we interviewed Doug Murray, the optimistic writer/co-creator of the series, before **The Nam** hit the stands. Even then he expected a good response to the comic. However, Murray, editor Larry Hama and artist Mike Golden have been pleased and surprised with the top numbers the comic is selling.

"I haven't seen any final sales figures yet," Doug comments (it takes almost ten months to receive final figures), "but we seem to be selling out all of our press run. This means that we're selling anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 copies per issue. This is certainly a lot better than we ever dreamed of when we started putting it together. It is pretty popular, and the first issue went into a second printing. They've upped the print run with the third issue, so we're not getting any numbers from the direct sales dealers that the demand is going down. It seems to be selling about equal with **GI Joe**, and this has been Marvel's top seller for the last six or eight months. We're right up there in the top ten!"

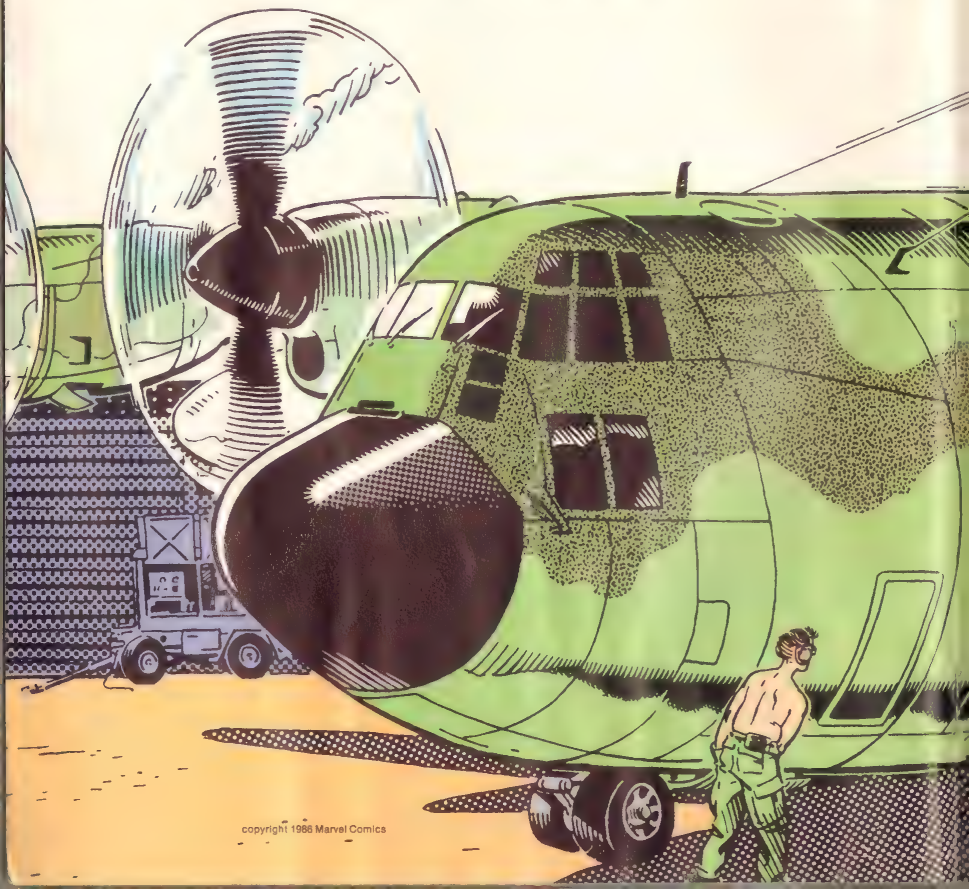
So what is in the future for the book? "A couple of weird things," he says with a grin. "Mike Golden was in town last month, and he's got some things he'd like to do in the future, like a graphic novel about **The 5th Of The 1st**. These were the stories we did together in the defunct **Savage Tales** magazine. He's also been working on covers for the magazine. So to cover — since he might fall a little behind — I wrote a story that will fit anywhere into the continuity about the entire basis of the Vietnam War. It starts with the Japanese invasion of French Indo-China in 1940 and goes up through the current time of the war as we're handling it in 1966. That's told from the point of view of a former VC who's now working as a Kit Carson scout with the American Forces. It's kind of a pocket history of the early years of the Vietnam War, when it was the French against the VC, which were then called the Viet-Minh. That's being done by a young guy named Wayne Van Zant, who's not a regular Marvel artist. He had submitted some samples to Larry about the French Foreign Legion that were really impressive, and were originally going to be for **Savage Tales**. This was cancelled, so we're trying to get him a shot at doing a graphic novel about the Foreign Legion. In the interim, he'll be doing fill-in issues of **The Nam**, and this will be the first of them. It'll probably appear, as things now look, as number 7 or 8. We're not really sure, but somewhere in that area.

**A completed cover that will never appear....**

"Number 7 in the current continuity is a story called "The Tunnel Rat." Again, that's a weird story, because it was originally done for **Savage Tales**, about a member of the 1st Air Calvary, who had previously been a tunnel rat back in 1966. He goes down some VC tunnels and has some problems." The VC, Doug explains, built an amazing complex of tunnels fairly close to American bases, which were discovered and explored by the US Forces. These had to be cleared of their VC builders, which was no simple process. "This story was about two-thirds finished by Golden when **Savage Tales** was cancelled. Because he wanted to use the pages, I wrote a framing story in which you see the tunnel rat in action in 1966 with the 23rd Infantry, and at the end of this story, he is rotating back to the States and tells Ed Marks that he's going to get out of the tunnel rat business because it's really dangerous. He's going airborn, so he can avoid ever going down the tunnels again. Then that ties into the other story. So there'll be two stories in the one comic, which is something we haven't done before."

## REAL TIME

One of the interesting concepts in **The Nam** is its use of "real time". As a month passes between comics, so a month of action passes for the characters within the comic. This means that the characters that begin the series will have to "rotate back to the States" during the course of the run — or get killed off. The current central character is Ed Marks, who'll be around till issue #12. "The tour of duty for a soldier in Vietnam in that time period was 12 months," Doug relates. "Considering he started in February of 1966, he'll end in February of 1967. In our continuity, that'll be roughly September 1987. The Top character — The First Sergeant — will get his come-uppance in number 5, which will be out by the time this interview appears. There'll be a little subplot involving the Top that'll get resolved in issue #6, so there's a lot of inter-personal stuff going on. A lot of the characters who



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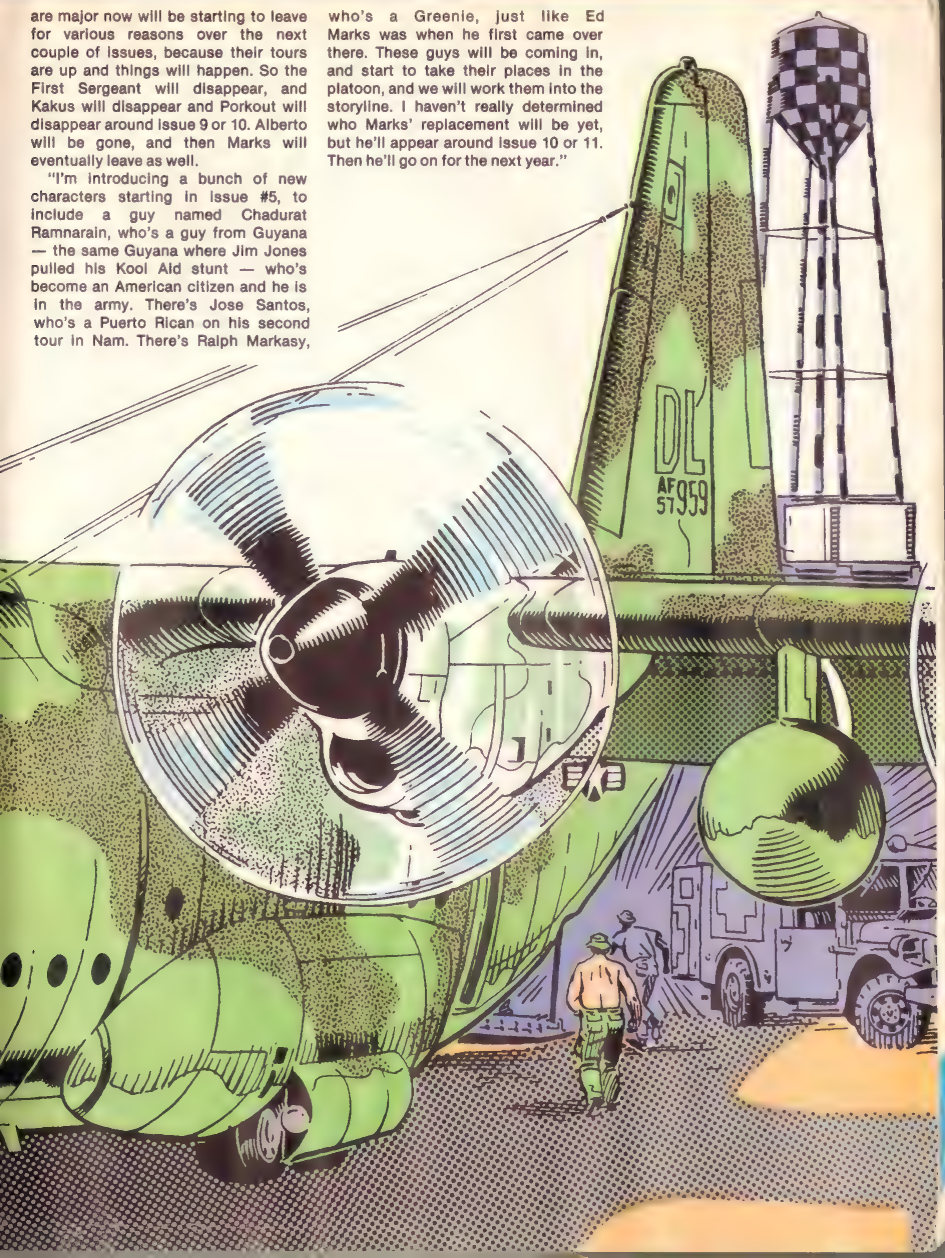
are major now will be starting to leave for various reasons over the next couple of issues, because their tours are up and things will happen. So the First Sergeant will disappear, and Kakus will disappear and Porkout will disappear around issue 9 or 10. Alberto will be gone, and then Marks will eventually leave as well.

"I'm introducing a bunch of new characters starting in issue #5, to include a guy named Chadurat Ramnarain, who's a guy from Guyana — the same Guyana where Jim Jones pulled his Kool Aid stunt — who's become an American citizen and he is in the army. There's Jose Santos, who's a Puerto Rican on his second tour in Nam. There's Ralph Markasy, who's a Greenie, just like Ed Marks was when he first came over there. These guys will be coming in, and start to take their places in the platoon, and we will work them into the storyline. I haven't really determined who Marks' replacement will be yet, but he'll appear around issue 10 or 11. Then he'll go on for the next year."



## GOLDEN ART

The artist on the book is Mike Golden, undeniably a fine artist, with a great grasp for period and action. Yet there are problems involved with working with such a perfectionist. "Golden is a really strange guy to work with," Doug admits. "He describes himself as being crazy, and he's absolutely right! He's a really fine artist who can do almost anything *but*... he's incredibly single-minded, and gets totally obsessive about what he's doing. One of the problems we had with him early in the book is that he'd spend *days* doing two or three pages, so that every detail would be absolutely correct in the pencils. Then the inker would get them, and the detail would disappear anyway, or not show up in the final printing. And he wasn't making his deadlines. So we got him to change his style a bit, and make things a little simpler, and that's worked out fairly well. He's working with an inker named Jim Bebe, who lives within ten minutes' drive of Mike's home in Florida." The original inker, Armando Gill, was dropped from the book after deadline problems plagued his work also. "So now the problem is that Golden is standing over Bebe's shoulder while Bebe inks, to make sure he's doing it the way Mike likes it! And he's not getting time to do his penciling... He's a really interesting guy to work with because there's always something new coming out of him, and he turns out beautiful work, but he can be really exasperating at the same time. You never know what's going to happen next! He's a perfect guy for the book, though, because he really loves the Vietnam War period, and he knows everything about the gear — more than I do. It shows in the pages. He's really a good storyteller.

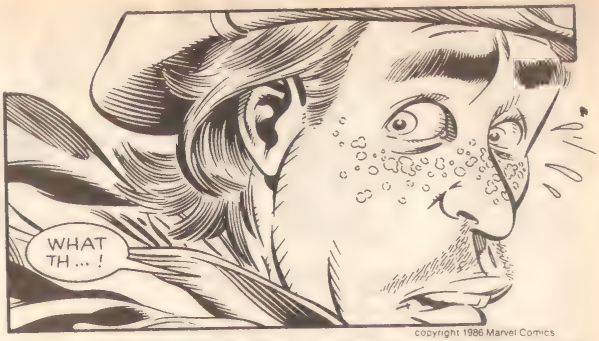
"We've had kind of a thing going. In the first two issues, I wrote the book down in script form, and he made changes to alter the story a little, so he could put two panels into one, or one panel into two, to make himself happy. In issues 3, 4 and 5 he followed my breakdowns exactly, doing it exactly the way I scripted it. Then we're gong back to his way for a couple of issues, so we'll rotate back and forth. I don't really think it makes any difference — I'm not egotistical enough to think that my stuff is always right! As long as the story works, I'm satisified, no matter

how he changes things around. It's worked out okay because he's made changes that are very positive, and I've really been happy with. His work is just super."

## CODE-APPROVED

Since **The Nam** is being issued as a Comics Code Authority approved book, this could have caused problems because of their language and violence. Doug emphasizes that there have been no problems as yet. "We've been real careful about our language," he laughed. "We *know* we can't get away with the cursing that we'd like to put in, so we had to make changes n the first couple of issues, until I got into the swing of writing it without using that language." (I hasten to add at this point that the strong language was written in originally because it was in character, not because Doug normally uses it!) "The cover to number 5 was changed because of the Comics Code. In the initial cover, which involves a village that's destroyed by the VC, we had some village headmen who had been tied to posts and who had been killed by the VC. There were some heads hanging from the posts as well. The comics Code said that we couldn't do that! We have a variant cover now, where the heads aren't there. Personally, I think that the original cover was stronger, and the heads were only seen in silhouette, but that's up to the Comics Code. That's the only real problem we've had with them. Ocassionally, we can get a curse word in if we're real careful how we use it. We can trade off two damns for a hell, or something like that...I've gotten into a habit now, working with Larry — who teaches me a lot about this sort of thing—of putting in things that they can take out, so that I can keep in something I really want. It works okay that way."

One question that he is constantly being asked about the book is whether he will be getting into the political problems involved in the war. "Only tangentially," he says. "We're not going to cover the political scene directly. We are not going to have the characters in Vietnam being involved in the political situation back in the States. However the troops in Vietnam *are* involved politically themselves, even though they may not realize it.

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The way they act, the way they think and the way they're being treated is a direct result of what's going on at home. So we'll show how they react to the newspaper articles, and what they see on tv about the home situation — particularly when we get into 1968, with the protests and the burning of the records, and Columbia University. We'll be having a trooper coming over from the States and being put into the outfit who's been involved in some of this. I'd like to do something on Kent State when we get to that time period. We'll touch on it, and show how it influenced the troops in Vietnam, but that's the only way we'll show it. In terms of how it influenced them, rather than in terms of what went on. It's not a question of skirting the issue as much as a case of showing how it reflects upon the action we're really dealing with. That's the important part of the trooper's point of view — how it affects *him*. That's how we'll handle it."

Another thorny issue is the problem that the troops faced returning home after their tour of duty. They were never treated as though they had been in a war, and until recently got virtually no recognition for their actions or the dangers they had faced for their country. "I'd like to do something with that," he confesses. "As the book is now constructed, we can't do anything about it. I haven't discussed this yet with Larry, but what I'd like to do is a graphic novel about Marks' returning

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home and going to college. The difficulties of the returning vet and leading into his going back to Nam as a correspondent. Our plan is that when Marks returns to the States he goes to college and becomes a reporter for a newspaper and returns to Vietnam. He's there as a correspondant in the pull-out from Saigon in 1974. I don't know if we'll be able to do that, but it's something I'd like to be able to get into at some point."

One point that most people know about the War was the prevalence of the use of drugs, something that the Comics Code makes really tough to portray. "Although under the Code we can deal with drugs, we have to show it and deal with it as a very negative effect. Anyone who uses drugs has to be killed, or maimed, or otherwise punished for his use of drugs in the course of the story. It's a little too pat for me to really want to do it that way. I may skirt the issue entirely, rather than handle it in a very superficial way. Hopefully the readers will understand that I'm doing this because it is the only realistic way I can handle it. If I go with it the Comics Code way, I can't really do what I'd like to do.

"As long as we don't show open wounds and things like that, we can get away with a lot in the field of violence. Golden's style, the fact that he's gone rather caricaturish for the characters — he's even got somewhat cartoony in the real violent stuff — has been a help. We haven't got any negative reaction about it, because it has an air of unreality that makes it easier for the kids to deal with, and the Comics Code is not getting dissatisified with it. So we can go ahead with that. We have a scene in the story called "The Good Old Days" — the history of the Vietnam War issue — with a bunch of people being hung by the French. Now, I don't know if they'll go along with that or not, but we'll find out!"

## READER REACTION

There is, understandably, a large amount of letters being generated in response to **The Nam**. "We're getting 40 to 50 letters a month, more than I expected," Doug amplifies. "That's a minimum. They seem to be split about 60-40, 60% from the kids, 40% from the vets. The vets' reaction on the whole has been really positive. Most of the vets really enjoy the book. I get a lot of letters talking about something that might be a mistake. For example, we've got a lot of letters about the patch that we're using for the 23rd Infantry, which is interesting. The history of the 23rd Infantry is kind of unique, and is one of the reasons why I picked it for the book. They were originally formed in Hawaii as part of the 25th Infantry, and wore the 25th Infantry patch, the tropic lightning patch, which is the patch that's pictured in the book right now. They were moved from Hawaii to Vietnam in January 1966, and went into action in February 1966, which is another reason why I used the outfit. In January 1967 they were reorganized as a separate unit, and got their own patch and their own unit crest. Now, we've gotten a lot of letters from vets saying we're using the wrong patch, that it should be the other patch, since it's the 23rd, not the 25th.

"One of the reasons that I think this happens is that it's a fact of life that vets tend to superimpose their own time in Vietnam over the entire war. I do it myself, so I understand how it's done. The Vietnam War is probably the longest war Americans have ever been involved in. It really went on for over 15 years, from the time we first got in in 1960, until we got out in 1975. And every vet — whether he was there in 1960, or 1965, or 1967 or whenever — has this picture that what went on while they were there is what went on during the entire war. It just isn't true. So a vet who was in the 23rd in 1968 had a certain patch, and assumes that they always had that patch. That's not the case.

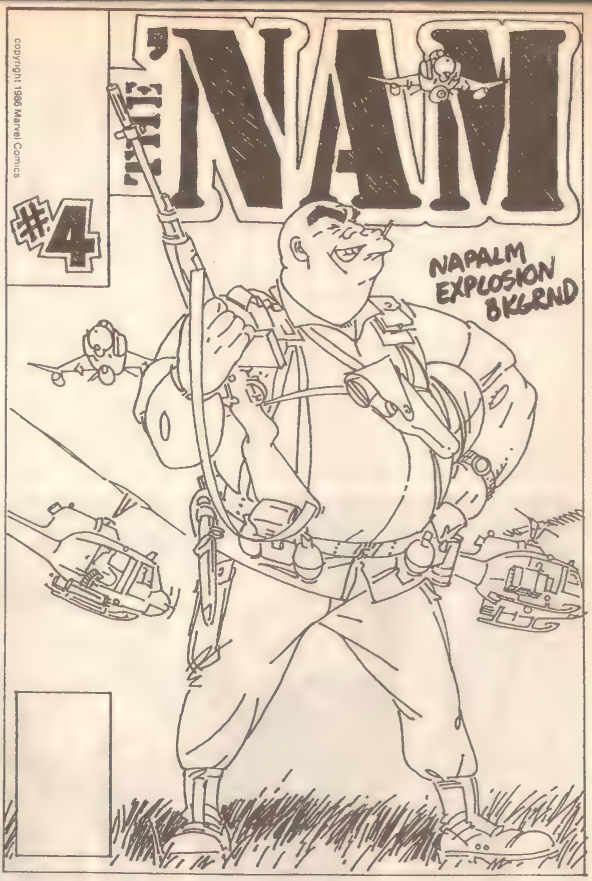
"By the same token, we get letters from vets telling us that some action happened say a month after we talked about it happening. That might be true, but there are certain things we have to do. Each story has to have a certain amount of action, otherwise no-one's going to read them. I may thus be forced to telescope something that happened in,say, June 1966 into May 1966. I *know* it didn't really happen then, but I'm forced by circumstances to do that. On the whole, though we do get letters telling us that we've made this mistake or that mistake, the vets still like the book, even when they think we've made a mistake. It doesn't really matter, because they're really happy that the war is being shown properly. We've gotten a lot of letters telling us that the person in question really disliked the idea of the book when they first heard about it, and then when they read it, they liked it. That's really gratifying, because it means that we're doing it right. We're always hearing from people saying, "I thought this was going to be a **Rambo**-esque type story, people fighting impossible odds and killing thousands of VC with a machine gun!" The fact that we're not doing that, that we're doing it the way it really happened, makes people very supportive, and that's the way it's gone."

On the subject of the response from the kids, he smiled. "It's been really

**A concept sketch for an unused cover....**

interesting," he confesses. "The letters from the kids get to be rather funny. They seem to be split between kids who say, "This is really great. I always wondered what this war was really like, because my father won't talk to me about it, or my uncle won't talk to me about it, or my brother won't talk to me about it. Now I can read about it." But we also get a lot of letters from kids who've read half of the available books on the Vietnam War, and are really thrilled that we're doing a comic about it. It's very odd, because I never thought that the audience would be like that. The younger audience has been much more knowledgable than I expected. They've been much more receptive to the concept that we're dong. Of course, we do get letters from 11-year-olds who say, "The only comics I read are GI Joe and **The Nam**, and why don't you do a story where GI Joes are in the Nam?" But even that's not a bad thing, because they're still picking up something. If they learn something without realizing it, then we've done something constructive. There's nothing wrong with that.

"We're getting a real small percentage of negative letters. Less than one percent. Those letters tend to be of a very strange variety like the guy who'll write in and say, 'Every Vietnam vet should be treated as a hero because they've taken so much crap. They should be treated better in the comics.' Or we'll get letters that say, 'You're a racist, because the cowardly black medic you show in issue 2 is the only black you show in the field.' This really shocked me, because the medic is Greek, and he's clearly identified as a guy named Kakis, and he's not even *colored* black! I don't even understand how this letter-writer can see him as a black character. I mean, we made the negative First Sergeant a black character, but we didn't do it because he's black. He's just a representative of the guys who were greedy and grafty and what-not, and we wrote number 4 as a story to explain how he got that way. How he was a man that was taken beyond his niche, and it bent him a little bit. The fact that people think that's a racist situation kind of bothers me, but, again, it's a really small percentage, and I think it's a case of them projecting onto us what *they* really think."




## MEDIA COVERAGE

Media coverage for **The Nam** has been both widespread and very positive. "An amazing amount," Doug agrees, "shocking both me and Marvel's publicity people. We expected some minor media interest at first, but this carried over *way* beyond anything we expected. I think that the turning point was **The Washington Post**. We had done some local tv news spots here on channel 11 and others, and talked to CBS and CBN, but the **Post** treated **The Nam** as if it was a regular book, not as a comic. They had their former Saigon bureau chief for the war years review the book as if it was a novel, and he liked it. This was nice, but from the time when that review came out in Mid-September we've done interviews for every major newspaper in the country, and we did three network news shows, and there have been over a hundred articles that have appeared on the book since then. These range from outright raves to 'Hey, they're doing comic books about the Vietnam War — isn't that strange?'

"There was a most interesting one from San Francisco, where the writer did two interesting things. First of all, he got three Vietnam vet friends of his

to read the book, and they were initially very negative about the book and then very positive once they actually read it. Then he went to talk to some kids near the University of Berkeley, and the kids' reactions really surprised me. They were college-aged, 18 to 20 years old, and they were all saying that the book wasn't realistic because there wasn't enough killing and blood in it! This is curious, because they have this picture of the war as endless killing for fifteen years, and it wasn't like that at all. At this point in time, either because of the movies or their own perceptions, they don't really understand what the war was like. It's certainly about killing, but there were not that many people killed on a daily basis. If you work out the casualty figures, there were about 15,000 men killed in Vietnam, and if you break that down over 15 years and the number of units in Nam, it's a situation where people are not killed in every unit every day. You just can't show that people are constantly being killed, because it's extremely unrealistic.

"It's strange that people have such a different view of the war. I'd be curious to see where it comes from. The literature about the war doesn't show it that way, and it may be just a question of the **Rambo** films giving people that kind of idea."

## ANTI-HERO

One review, in **Newsweek**, had called Ed Marks a "cultural anti-hero of the times." "I don't know if he's an anti-hero," Doug says. "I've tried to make him like everyman. He's just a naive young guy who's thrust into a situation that's totally foreign to anything he's ever seen before. One of the things that I'm doing with the character is that now, as he's becoming more experienced, as happened with a lot of troops, he's starting to get this feeling of invulnerability. He feels that he's better than everybody else, and his troops are better than everybody else and therefore he can't get hurt. We're going to do something to shatter that little bubble in upcoming issues. It's a real thing that happens to troops — if you're together for five or six months with the same group of guys, and you're in some action where you come out unscathed, you start to feel like "nothing can happen to me." Young people *always* feel like this, and this is reinforced when you're in a wartime situation, and you don't get scratched. Unfortunately, it often ends in a really violent and devastating way when someone close to you gets killed, or you get shot yourself. I want to show that, and we're going to get into that in the next couple of issues.

"One of the things we did with this

"Punisher" ™ 1986 Marvel Comics

'Good Old Days' story is to do a framing story with some existing character and get into other situations. So we're going to be trying to do some other things in the book. We'll talk a little about the river patrols, and something about some of the special action groups and things like that." One interesting subject was the use of dogs in the war. "Dogs were used very extensively," he explains, "particularly in the early years of the war. I'd like to get into that, so we'll cover it to some extent, when we reach early 1967. The VC had orders to kill the dogs before the handlers, because the dogs were more dangerous to them. They tried that in the tunnels, too. In the tunnels, the dogs weren't too effective, because in the close quarters they would run so far ahead of their handlers that they could be disposed of before their handlers knew what was going on. They stopped using dogs and started using people, because people were easier to train, and essentially less expensive than the dogs. A good sentry dog was expensive, and took a long time to train, whereas you can train a trooper in eight weeks, so he's a lot easier to replace. That may seem callous, but it's the way that the world works."

## TOPICAL

Since the comic is set in "real time," it has to interrelate very closely with the real world, which causes the writer a lot of extra work. "I have to be real careful with that, and I do my research. I work at it a little backwards, because I determine what's going to happen to my characters first, then I find some sort of action that covers it. Sergeant Rock isn't the real world — he's been fighting World War II for over thirty years now, and he's destroyed more Tiger Tanks than the Germans had! What can you expect? It's interesting that DC is now publishing some Vietnam stories in the back of their **Sergeant Rock** books. Fifteen years ago, when I first got out of the army, I wrote a couple of Vietnam war books for DC, and one of them was published as a World War II story. This really annoyed me, and caused me to stop doing it for a long time. Now, for the last two issues, DC has published World War II stories that have been changed to Vietnam stories! That's really weird, because in one of them the whole key to the story is this burial sequence in which they're burying this trooper under the traditional rifle with the helmet on top. That didn't happen in Nam. When they knew where they were, they always took the bodies home. They didn't bury them in Nam, they just returned them. So obviously someone had done a World War II story, and they just made it into a Vietnam story because it was suddenly more topical. That's kind of interesting.

"There have been no obvious imitations of **The Nam** so far, but I'm sure that it'll happen. If the sales figures hold together, you can pretty much guarantee that someone's going to try and do something about it. We have another concept that Larry Hama is working on with someone else to do a comic about the Marine Corps in Vietnam, which I would not be qualified to work on. He's got a writer to work on it who was in the Marines and is an experienced writer, and they are trying to get it together. It will cover the war from a different angle, because essentially it was fought from three aspects. There was the Army aspect in general, but the Infantry aspect in particular. Then you have the Naval aspect, which is the river patrols and the SEALs and things like that. Then there is the Marines, which paralleled the Army to a certain degree but the action involved is a lot different. The Marines are really strange. Army guys used to call them 'Jar-heads' and less flattering names because the Marines were so gung-ho and crazy, but you can do some good stories about it."

**Turn to page 52 to learn the strange future of Mark Hazard, The Merc...**

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# HEROES™

BY JAMES VAN HISE

# MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER

4000 A.D.

In early 1962, an idea was born in the mind of Chase Craig, editor of Western Publishing Company (Gold Key). This idea was to do a comic which took place in the far future, such as their comic **THE JETSONS** did, except that the science fiction concepts would be treated seriously. He wanted it to be about a future society dominated by robots.

Russ Manning first heard of the book when in March, 1962, Jack Taylor, the Art Director, mentioned to Russ that he was being considered for the book. Russ immediately went to Chase Craig to ask him about it. They discussed the idea and Russ was able to not only land the art assignment but the writing assignment as well due to his having read a great deal of science fiction. Due to the concept still being in a very simple form, that of not much more than an idea, Russ was given free reign in developing and fleshing out the character. Manning had decided to make the character a Tarzan of the future. Man at his simplest. Originally he gave the character...a stone hammer slung at his side which he would use to over come robots. The names Manning submitted for the character were Hammer, Mann and Magnus. Chase, and his assistant Zetta DeVoe, went over Manning's layout for the character and made suggestions. That they adopted the name Magnus was one of them. It was Manning's wife, Dodie, who suggested he drop the idea of the hammer and replace it with a form of super karate.

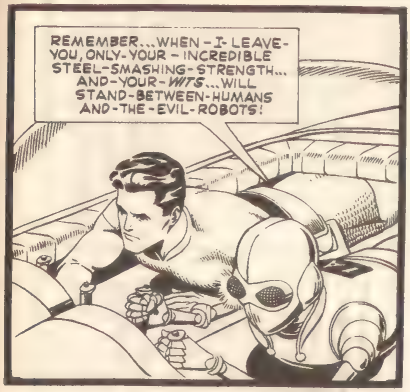
Originally, there were two concepts for the costume Magnus would wear, both different from what he finally did wear. The first was just a pair of red trunks and a pair of strapless soles that stuck to the bottom of his feet. The second was a sleeveless jump suit such as most other characters in the Magnus comics wore. The just trunks costume was chosen and Manning drew the entire 27 page first story for the first issue with this costume. It was sent East and then promptly returned with a request that Magnus wear some clothes. It was okay for Tarzan to run around half clad, but not Magnus, for whatever reasons. Manning then submitted more costume designs and the tunic, trunks and boots was chosen. He then went through the entire strip and redrew the costume in all the panels. On the first page he gave coloring instructions but neglected to mention what color the boots were to be, just assuming the colorist would realize that boots are black. The colorist didn't and this is the odd origin of Magnus' unique concept of white boots.

Thus although Magnus was not solely created by Russ Manning, it was largely shaped and molded by him from ideas suggested by others. The late artist Jess Marsh, who drew the Tarzan comic for many years before Russ Manning took it over at Gold Key, suggested the human mind computer which was used by the robot H-8 in **MAGNUS** #1. One might also trace this idea to a story which appeared in the E.C. comic **WEIRD FANTASY** #17 in the story *"Ahead of the Game"* which appeared in 1953.

Although there were several other writers who worked on Magnus throughout its existence, Russ Manning was the chief writer as he wrote the first issue and others and often reworked the stories in issues he did not write. The robot speech receptor implanted in Magnus' skull was Manning's idea, one which he came up with while writing the first story.

The first issue of **MAGNUS** hit the stands around November of 1962 when Gold Key was publishing quite a few titles, many of them one shots. But Magnus was no one shot. It was announced as a quarterly in the first issue and it remained so throughout Russ Manning's five year tenure on the strip.

The first issue introduced us to Magnus and the world of 4000 A.D. It is the glittering world of the far future often pictured in science fiction. The entire continent of North America is now one multileveled city called North Am. But there is a fly in the ointment. Mankind has become too dependent on his robot servants, and in subtle deadly ways the servants have become the masters. This is what Magnus has come to stop and to prevent from growing. At opposite you see him discussing his purpose among humanity with his teacher, the robot, 1A, from page three of **MAGNUS** #1. At first Magnus wanders among the people, observing them. He takes no direct action until he sees a robot destroy a book some children were reading about tyrants of the past. Despite its built-in directive, this robot is giving orders to humans. The children push the robot over the ledge, destroying it, but Polrobs come to take them away... for destroying a renegade robot. Magnus goes into action and destroys the two robots. He has struck the first blow in the revolution against the robots. In escaping the robots he meets another robot resister, Leeja Clane, daughter of Senator Clane of North Am. Here for the only time in the series, he reveals his origin. Magnus explains that he was an orphan and that as a baby he was taken by 1A, a robot, to a bubble-house in the deepest part of the Antarctic Ocean. He was raised by 1A, who is a robot with virtually human intelligence who can see what evil robots are doing to mankind. Magnus was trained in every science known to man, but his intellectual training was not confined to just hard science. One scene shows a young Magnus reading **THE PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS JEFFERSON.** And then, as Magnus put it, "with the most perfect method ever achieved, he trained my body...my muscles and nervous system...to steel smashing strength!"


REMEMBER...WHEN - I - LEAVE - YOU, ONLY - YOUR - INCREDIBLE STEEL - SMASHING - STRENGTH... AND - YOUR - WITS... WILL STAND - BETWEEN - HUMANS AND - THE - EVIL - ROBOTS!

On the subject of Magnus' robot smashing ability it is interesting to note that no one involved in the creation and development of the character knew anything about karate, just as very few people reading comics, even today, really know anything about karate... other than the name. Manning readily admits that he really knows nothing about karate and feels, in looking back, that the way he drew Magnus demonstrated this lack of knowledge on his part. In the letters column of **MAGNUS** #5, a reader asks to have them show Magnus using other forms of karate such as kindo and judo The response they gave totally ignored the question, thus revealing that they didn't know what the guy was talking about, although the question itself, obviously delivered by someone with some working knowledge of the subject, demonstrated that Manning's bluff was far more successful than he gives it credit for.

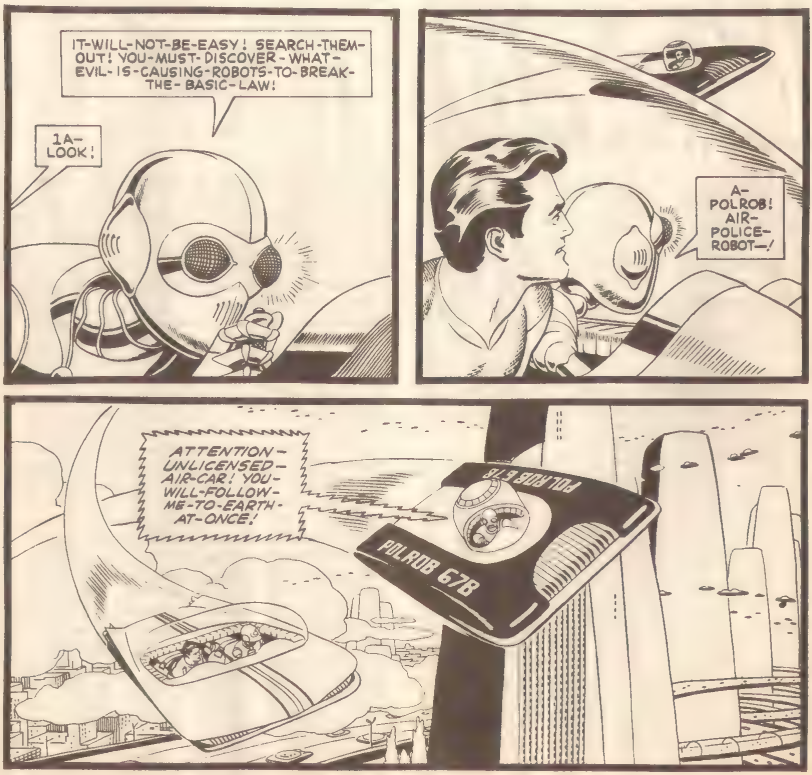
The remainder of the first issue of **MAGNUS** details his encounter with his first truly evil intelligent robot, the chief of Central Rob, H-8 (which the robot himself says he pronounces as "hate"). The encounter is very powerful and the dialogue amid the crashing battle is well handled. Russ Manning did an excellent job on the writing and as good as many of the issues were that followed, this issue remains the best, storywise, of the run.

During the first year of **MAGNUS** one can see Russ Manning's art developing, his lines becoming bolder, his style more powerful. Although the art in the first issue is very good, excellent in fact, it is not his more polished style of drawing we would come to know by issue number five. Russ Manning had been doing work for Gold Key for several years (besides in many of their movie and tv titles, he did strips in the back of many of the early issues of Dell's **TARZAN**) and his style had gradually been maturing. But it was during **MAGNUS** that it developed the most in the shortest period of time. By **MAGNUS** #18, four and one-half years later, he had not only hit his stride in doing more detailed backgrounds and breathing more life into his characterizations, but was also doing marvelous things with light and shadow to enhance not only the mood of the story but the design of his creations. As great as the work he has done on **TARZAN** since he left comic books has been, it doesn't begin to approach the mastery of imagination revealed in his ultra-SF work on **MAGNUS**.

The stories in **MAGNUS** introduced many new comic fans, myself included, to many marvelous new worlds of science fiction. The first issue introduced us to the world of Magnus in general, and to him in particular. The second issue seemed to only mark time as Magnus battled a robot duplicate of himself. The third issue introduced the recurring villain Xyrkol (pronounced Zurkol) and took Magnus from a North Am besieged by a gigantic robot, to a distant planet and back again. The fourth issue took us to the world beneath the sea circa 4000 A.D. and the many food processing laboratories which exist to attempt to help supply the vast needs of North Am's population. In the fifth issue, even before we are introduced to the threat of the reappearance of Xyrkol, we encounter luxurious floating restaurants drifting high over North Am on magnetic beams. In this issue, when Magnus encounters the threat of Sigma, an apparently immortal robot, he turns to his mentor, 1A for help. Although Leeja comes across a bit too much as a dimwit in this issue, the story is still very tight and the use of a pure black and white panel covering two-thirds of the page, purely for its effects and impact, again show the stuff of which this comic was made. It was things such as this, the artwork not just telling the story but working hand in hand with it, that set it off from any of the other comics on the stands. Issue five was the first issue

since number one that was solely written by Manning, which further explains the careful integration of story and art. Issue six, which wasn't written by Manning, further introduces us to the world of 4000 A.D. In this case it involved an Earth probe project in which machines bored into the Earth with archeologists and their families who set up living quarters and labs underground. But even here the robot threat rises in the form of a robot built of a new super hard metal discovered by the scientists, a robot which rebels and takes over. The story has plenty of action and even weird underground monsters called Troglodytes. This was unusual as this was the only time any non-metallic monsters appeared in the entire series.

Number seven was written by Manning again and was called "The Power of the One Thousand" and referred to the humans Magnus had freed from Central Rob in issue one. The story introduced us to the Gophs, the petty criminals and social misfits who live on the very lowest levels of the city. Manning admits that he tends to put a lot into his stories, and this one is a prime example as it also has a plague that destroys robots, the re-return of Xyrkol, and a journey 60,000 light years away from Earth to the planet Malev-6 which is a robot world. This world is one gigantic electronic brain which even has an origin of how it



came to be. Magnus uses his wits as well as his strength to defeat it, although his ultimate salvation comes from the power of the one thousand minds who search the universe mentally looking for him. Issue eight, also written by Manning, revealed more of the wonders of North Am, in this case North Am's weather control station and that a thousand years before a war had been fought over its institution. The imagination unleashed by Manning in his art here is nothing short of glittering, from the wonders of the festival to the encounter with the ancient battle rob which takes over weather control. This issue ranks as one of the top five of the series. The story had even more elements than those which we saw in it as Manning agreed when his editors said they felt it had *too* much in it when they got to things like cat people from outer space. After reading it one wonders how it could have possibly contained anything else.

Number nine had robots which contained the thought processes of a man who had died. He had programmed the robots to seek revenge on Magnus and the council of North Am because they refused to follow his design for mankind's total dependance on robots. Due to a powerful force field, the robots are invincible. They're so successful in resisting every means of destroying them that they finally have to be dealt with by tricking them into a rocket and blasting them into space.

Issue ten has another return engagement of Magnus versus Xyrkol. This time Magnus tracks him down at the south pole, and for the second time (he also did it in number five) uses Xyrkol's body to smash a robot! For the first time Magnus actually captures Xyrkol,but that is not the climax of the story. This comes when he must defeat a giant android built by Xyrkol. This issue has something else to recommend it. In the "Robot Gallery" (a page where they publish drawings sent in by fans) there's a marvelous drawing of a weird guard rob done by one Walter Simonson of College Park, Maryland. And if there is any doubt that it's the same Walter Simonson whose art is much admired today, all one has to do is look at the signature. This was in 1965!

Fan writer and publisher Richard Kyle sent editor Chase Craig a synopsis about a talking dog. Chase didn't use it but Manning used it for inspiration when he wrote *"Beasts of Steel"* for issue #11. This also ranks near the top of quality issues in the series as it introduced us to the intelligent neo-animals which included a huge snake, a puma, an eagle, a raccoon and two talking apes. This issue marked the first return of Mekman from issue number two. Mekman uses robot wolves and gorillas in his plot against North Am. This story has an unusual touch in the way Mekman uses a post-hypnotic suggestion to overcome the psycho-probes designed to cure his criminal tendencies.

In issue twelve a madman plans to destroy North Am through the use of volcanoes and earthquakes. When he is made to realize that he is sick and needs help, his robots won't let him end his plan and they continue on without him, as they were programmed. Again in this issue, the defeat of the robots is not the climax as they had done their work too well. The story has twists and turns every step of the way. The three-quarter page panel on the last page adds a beautiful touch to the end of the story.

Issues thirteen through nineteen continued to maintain a high level in both story and art. All of them had high points and memorable moments. #13 had its journey to a spaceship orbiting the sun and the weird robots therein. It also featured one of the best covers of the entire series. Number fifteen featured *"The Weird World of Mogul Badur,"* and weird it was, as well as one of the best Magnus adventures. The journey into another dimension and the bizarre world therein revealed as yet new heights in Manning's art and writing. Number sixteen reintroduced the characters introduced in number eleven, namely Danae and her neo-animals. This issue had a talking neo-dog and in between the action was a lot of good writing involving conflict of characters and emotional development. It's another example of why this comic was so different, so special, from others. Number seventeen had an alien from space and a lot of bizarre action, as well as Russ Manning's art in tip top form. In number eighteen 1A makes a surprise appearance when Magnus becomes a fugitive from North Am when he's falsely accused of being a non-human alien. The story has its usual twists and a lot of incredible Manning art.

In numbers twenty and twenty one the writing seemed less inspired than in previous issues, and Russ Manning himself admits that he didn't think his last issue, #21, was very good. The last issue he did he got into magic and fully costumed Indians and seemed way off track from the directions the series had been heading. Issue #22 was a reprint of number one as Manning left Gold Key entirely to begin working on the Tarzan newspaper strip.

After Manning left, the series continued through issue 28 with art by such artists as Paul Norris and Mike Royer, but the writing wasn't up to the creativity that Manning had infused the strip with. The book continued sporadically after #28 with Manning reprints and in the late Seventies Magnus even had a brief revival as a backup strip in the pages of **Dr. Solar**, but the strips were short and the costume was inexplicably altered to give Magnus long pants (which was actually one of the early costume designs which Manning had discarded years before).

Russ Manning went on to a successful stint on the **Star Wars** daily and Sunday strip after leaving **Tarzan**. Illness caused him to leave the **Star Wars** strip in 1981 and several months later, in December of that year, he died of cancer. His work on Magnus and Tarzan remains some of the most exciting work ever done in comics.

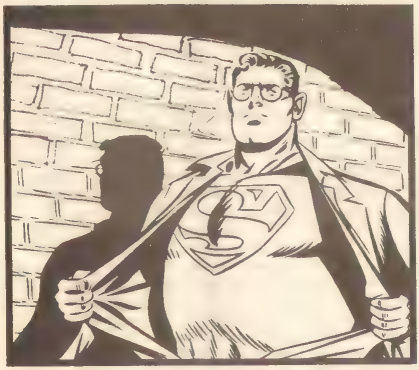
CF

**JAMES VAN HISE is the former editor of one of the oldest fanzines in the comic book field, author of The Art of Al Williamson and editor of Monsterland.**

# SILVER AGE

Gerard Jones ™

# A SUPER WORLD



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With all the hype and hubbub surrounding the new John Byrne Superman, it is easy to forget that the Man of Steel had been the subject of great and exciting stories before. And not just in the late 1930s, under the direct control of the young Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Not just in the explosive violence and patriotism of World War Two, either, when the superheroes had their "Golden Age." There was another great age for Superman, one that tends to be either ignored or too easily dismissed by the modern breed of comic fan: A brief but eventful age beginning at the end of the 1950s, reaching its peak from 1961 to 1966, and tapering to the end of 1970.

## QUICK WITS NOT FISTS

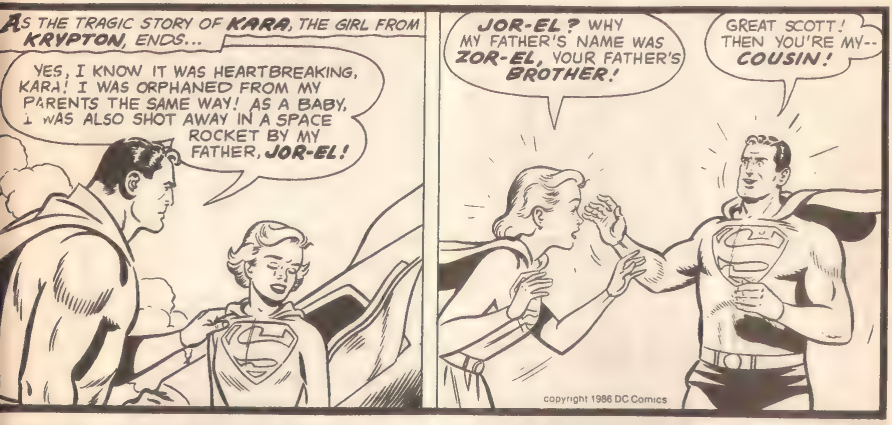
Comic books have changed enormously from 1959 to the present. The superheroes, especially, have been turned inside out and upside down and come out as an almost completely different type of character, meeting the demands of a fundamentally different genre. In 1959, superhero comics (most of all the Superman line) scarcely emphasized fight scenes at all, instead building their plots around mysteries, riddles, and challenges that were often mental. The superheroes at DC had largely "soft" powers; action scenes were more likely to involve shots of flight, super speed running, super breath or magical transformation by a power ring than they were to show punches being thrown.

Under Mort Weisinger, the former literary agent and pulp magazine editor who had become Superman's guiding hand, action was particularly minimized. Weisinger specifically preferred stories in which Superman got out of troubles by his wits rather than his strength. He also liked plots full of lots of twists and turns and information, but pressed into very few pages. The result of this was a picture-book sort of storytelling, with little flow of action from panel to panel and large blocks of words. Each picture usually represented a major step in the plot, and dialogue was needed to flesh out the story.

This approach to storytelling didn't, in itself, have to make the stories dull. But it did mean that there wouldn't be any visceral, crunching body blows and flying fists to carry a reader through a flimsy plot. It meant that the subject matter of the stories had to be interesting to the readers and the plots had to be solid and entertaining on their own merits. It was as if Mort Weisinger wanted the comic book plots submitted by his writers to be strong enough to work even without pictures, like magazine fiction.

## SEARCHING FOR DIRECTION

Superman had run into some troubles by the late 1950s. The idea of characterization was almost unknown to the kid-oriented superhero comics of those years, so the hero himself didn't hold much appeal as an individual. In any case, he was so perfect and moral and cheerful that there probably wasn't much one could have made of him. His powers were so limitless that it had become very difficult to think up plausible threats and challenges for him. The stories had come to depend on kryptonite (it was all green then), which weakened Superman, or occasional other devices to compromise or circumvent his powers. Weisinger never seems to have favored a rogues gallery of colorful villains, so most of Superman's opponents were bank robbers in fedoras. His one recurring foe, Lex Luthor, had fallen into a very repetitive pattern of whipping up a


AS THE TRAGIC STORY OF KARA, THE GIRL FROM KRYPTON, ENDS...
YES, I KNOW IT WAS HEARTBREAKING, KARA! I WAS ORPHANED FROM MY PARENTS THE SAME WAY! AS A BABY, I WAS ALSO SHOT AWAY IN A SPACE ROCKET BY MY FATHER, JOR-EL!
JOR-EL? WHY MY FATHER'S NAME WAS ZOR-EL, YOUR FATHER'S BROTHER!
GREAT SCOTT! THEN YOU'RE MY-- COUSIN!
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new gadget to beat Superman, going on a crime spree, and then being outwitted and sent to prison. In general, Superman's stories were in a rut of boring challenges, predictable twists and turns, and then contrived resolutions.

We'll never know just what was going through Mort Weisinger's thoughts in those years. Obviously he had to do something about the lackluster adventures of comic books' premier superhero, and in retrospect we can think of several avenues he might have followed. But most options would not have seemed open to him at the time. Turning the Superman stories into muscular slugfests would have been unlikely; violence was shied away from in those first few years after the Comics Code was imposed, and in any case scarcely any of the artists available in comic books made a specialty of action art any longer (one who did, Jack Kirby, was in between the first great period of his popularity and the second, and was doing little work for DC). And the lengthy sagas and endless subplots which keep so many comic book series afloat today would have been unthinkable (and probably forbidden by editorial policy) before Stan Lee and his artist/collaborators at Marvel launched their revolution in 1961.

Whatever options Weisinger considered and rejected, we'll never know. It's hard to establish even whether he set out consciously to remodel the Superman family of comics, or whether the new approach merely evolved from a gaggle of his ideas and the contributions of a couple of ingenious writers (namely, Jerry Siegel and Otto Binder). But the end result made Weisinger look brilliant: A whole world — a body of lore and history, a huge supporting cast, a complex network of relationships, a web of themes and ironic connections — centering on Superman and giving him meaning.

## A SUPER WORLD

It's painful for those of us who know and love the Superman universe of the 1960s to watch DC scrap that very world and supporting cast in the interest of revitalizing the Man of Steel. Maybe it had to be done. Indeed, not much of that unique Superman lore had been used since Mort Weisinger retired in 1970, and what had been retained had grown stale and largely colorless. But we, or this writer at least, always believed that that world could be brought back, revitalized and made modern...or that a new world could be conceived in the same spirit of wide-open invention and cosmic scope, and that Superman could be brought back to youth and vigor through it.

Certainly Weisinger's world could not be brought back as it was. His world was charming, youthful, innocent and intricate. But most of all it was bizarre. New cast members, crises and variations on Superman's life story were tossed out with a whimsical, unrestrained imagination that no one would dare display in these days of self-importantly serious super heroes, these days of trying to reach an older readership with a concern for realism.

Many aspects of the Superman mythos are a little hard to swallow, true. But once you suspend your disbelief a little, once you accept these as the elements of the fictional universe you are entering, you find a remarkable

internal cohesion, a real sincerity of purpose holding the stories together, pulling you along until the charm, the irony and the pathos swallow you up as surely as they would have when you were seven years old.

A city in a bottle, for example. The city of Kandor was introduced in **Action Comics #242**, July, 1958, as a small, preserved piece of Superman's Kryptonian past. That single story added four critical elements to the Superman mythos: First, it gave him a regular, powerful, science-fictionish foe in the person of Brainiac, the evil green space pirate who had shrunken and stolen the city; second, it brought him in contact for the first time in a dramatically effective way with his heritage as a Kryptonian, something that had been generally ignored for his first twenty years; third, it presented an insurmountable challenge of a strongly emotional nature, for Superman wanted desperately to return the city to normal size and couldn't, which gave him a dimension of frailty and tragedy as a character for the first time; and, fourth, it provided a setting for many wonderfully exotic, colorful, suspenseful adventures in an environment which deprived Superman of his super powers.

It was of such small strokes with far-reaching implications that the new Superman world was built. From Kandor came the Superman Emergency Squad, a legion of tiny Kryptonians who find they gain Superman's powers when they leave the bottle city; after them followed the Supergirl Emergency Squad, her own secret weapon. Occasionally Superman would visit Kandor with his pal Jimmy Olsen and they would adopt the identities of Flamebird and Nightwing, non-super powered crimefighters modelled after their friends Batman and Robin. These stories gave Weisinger and his writers the chance to do Batman the way they would have handled him with some super-science and unearthly settings tossed in. Further explorations of the bottle city revealed Van Zee, a Kryptonian scientist who is a distant relative and exact double of Superman, and his wife, Sylvia, who happens to be a double of Lois Lane; later Kandorian doubles of other Earthly Superman cast members would turn up.

These sorts of odd contrivances — characters gaining the powers or attributes of others and using them in revealingly different ways; people who look just like others and live lives ironically reflecting those of the people they resemble; people modelling themselves after others and experiencing strangely analogous adventures in different contexts — were the nails that held the house of Weisinger together. Implausible they were. But they were so fascinating in their invention and intricacy, and so logical and thorough in the way they were developed that they never became repetitive.

## MICROCOSMIC DESTINY

A microcosm of the whole thing appears in **Action Comics** #314, July 1964, "The Day Superman Became the Flash." This story reveals that Jor El, Superman's father, had consulted a "computer forecaster," a machine capable of formulating a high-probability forecast of the future, in order to determine to what planet to send his child Kal El. Before deciding on Earth, where Jor El had seen that Kal El would become a great hero, he had discarded five other planets on which Kal would have battled crime under such guises as a sea king, a tiny titan, a super archer, a speedster and a dark night detective — all modelled after Superman's cohorts in the Justice League of America — but on which he would have been unhappy, alienated or met an early death.

The theme of destiny runs through all the great Weisinger stories. We are told that history cannot be changed, that a fate awaits us all which will shape us more than we can shape it, that sometimes we come to moments when we can change that fate or exchange ours for another's...but that the only result of that will be misery. We must live the destiny given to us. Over and over again Superboy met super powered young men from other planets, whose powers and situations were always amazingly like his own. Often he would try to change their situation, or try to adopt it. But always the power of destiny forced him back to his own life.

## TWISTS IN TIME

History and destiny took on a strange quality in the Weisinger stories for time itself had a strangely looping nature, making the past seem soft and malleable, the present multi-layered. Superman's adventures as an adult ran in two comics: **Superman** and **Action Comics**. Yet, simultaneously, we were able to read of his adventures as a boy in two others: **Superboy** and **Adventure comics**. In 1962, **Adventure Comics** shifted its focus to the Legion of Super Heroes, a super team in the Thirtieth Century of which Superboy (through his power of time travel) was a member. New developments in **Superboy** would alter the present reality of **Superman** and **Action Comics**, but would not have been reflected in the issues from the very last month. And the future events portrayed in **Adventure Comics** might suddenly prove impossible in the light of new events in our past or present.

Weisinger and his writers went on merrily making changes in past, present and future...yet they never cavalierly disregarded those changes, but wove them into the increasingly tangled skein of Superman's life. With all the time-travel stories, Superbaby stories, Superboy stories and Untold Tales, it always seemed as though nothing more could be added to the Man of Steel's biography. But then would come another story, adding another delightful twist.

Holding it all together was irony. The choice of that powerful dramatic emotion, the favorite device of the Greek playwrights, gave the Superman stories of the 1960s an enchantment and emotional weight that belied their simple storybook narrative and childlike themes. In the greatest of the tragic, romantic "Imaginary Stories," for example, Superman marries in turn each of the women he loves but cannot have in the regular comic book continuity: Lois Lane, Lana Lang and the mermaid Lori Lemaris. But each marriage ends when he, or his role as Superman, ironically brings about the death of his beloved wife. Again, the force of destiny has its way; Superman's destiny is to remain alone, holding the women at arm's length, a fact which the triply grim ending of the Imaginary Story reinforces.

## MODERN DAY MYTHS

Yes, it was wild, far-fetched stuff. The ironies and coincidences piled on each other until they reached the point of contrivance. The Weisinger stories probably couldn't be brought back just as they were and be accepted by today's comic book audience. But they have a powerful pull, not unlike the hypnotic draw of ancient drama, of dreams, and of the myths of preliterate peoples. Or, an example closer to the point: Not unlike the strong, complex, emotional fantasies of children. Because Weisinger and his writers really did tap into the odd world-view of young kids, with its powerful but simple feelings, its constantly shifting impressions of reality and memory, its frighteningly huge external forces, and the terrible pathos we all feel when we first fully realize that the world is not ours to command and control.

Such themes and emotions enabled Superman to grow from cipher to character, enabled his milieu to deepen from cardboard backdrop to three-dimensional world. Sometime, in a future article, I will explore the development of Superman's character and the people around him, take a look at the unique approach to comic book characterization and dramatic subplots that Mort Weisinger and his stable forged during the years that his work was being overshadowed by the young Marvel Comics Group.

But for now, I hope you'll excuse me while I retire to read a few **Superman** comics. No, not the new ones. The old ones.

**CF**

**Gerard Jones is the co-author of The Beaver Papers and The Comic Heroes as well as of numerous articles in National Lampoon and various other places.**

# BEFORE SILVER AGE

BY JAMES VAN HISE

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## TALES FROM THE CRYPT

**BORN: JANUARY 1950** **DIED: NOVEMBER 1954**

**R.I.P.**

*"The great Horror Comics of the Fifties, as we've come to remember them — were a brand-new concept in both comic art and story-telling. Seriously conceived and executed, wildly and freely creative, it was a sign of their excellence that they never really died a natural death. They were killed — legally tried and ultimately executed like criminals — by a frightened generation of witch hunters."*

*— Larry Stark from "An Appreciation" in* **Horror Comics of the 1950's** *(Nostalgia Press 1971)*

When the Golden Age of comics began winding down in the late Forties, publishers started searching for a new trend to bring back the readers. Crime comics began to proliferate in the late Forties, but these still didn't capture the popular interest the way that the seemingly endless supply of superheroes had during the days of World War Two.

Into this climate of flux and change came Bill Gaines, a college chemistry major who found himself suddenly the beneficiary of the family business when his father Max, a prime mover and shaker in comics in the late Thirties, was killed in a boating accident. It was the summer of 1947 when 25 year old Bill Gaines took over. One of his father's titles, **International Comics** was changed to **International Crime Patrol** and Gaines started trying horror stories with the crime stories as a test of the marketplace. The test continued as the title changed to **Crime Patrol** after one issue. Since the artists he had working at the company didn't seem suited for the new types of stories he was introducing into the line, he began looking for new talent. Two horror stories appear in **Crime Patrol #14** (one by Johnny Craig, the other drawn by Al Feldstein) and in issue 15 the feature "The Crypt of Terror" is introduced hosted by The Crypt Keeper (his first appearance). The Crypt Keeper appears again in issue 16, which is to all intents and purposes a horror comic. The numbering remained the

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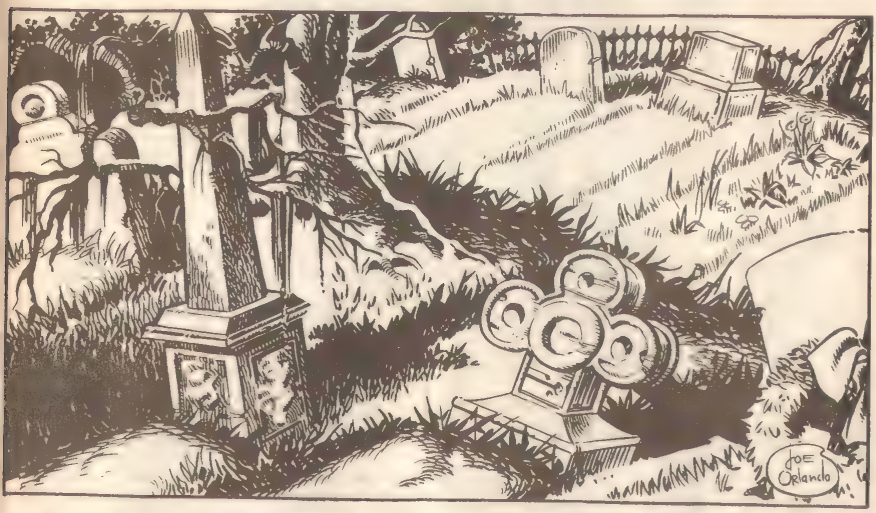


same but with issue 17 **Crime Patrol** became **The Crypt of Terror.**

Issues 17 - 19 were titled **The Crypt of Terror** but then Gaines decided to tone down the title and changed it to **Tales From the Crypt** with issue #20. Even in the late Forties, there was already a protest building among educators and psychologists against the violence in crime comics. Since crime comics weren't selling that well anyway, Gaines chose to go in another direction and began what he called his "New Trend" titles, of which **Tales From The Crypt** was one of the first. The early members of his new staff included Johnny Craig, Al Feldstein, Wally Wood and the talent who would come to be regarded as comics premiere artist of horror — Graham Ingels.

## TABOOS?

Sheldon Mayer, who worked as an editor for Max Gaines for ten years, once outlined those things which the company's writers and artists must never do. Primary on the list were such taboos as:

1) Never show anybody stabbed or shot;
2) Show no torture scenes;
3) Never show a hypodermic needle;
4) Don't chop the limbs off anybody;
5) Never show a coffin, especially with anybody in it.

When Bill Gaines began his horror comics, which included **Vault of Horror** at the same time as **Crypt** (followed within a couple months by **Haunt of Fear**) he made short work of Mayer's taboos. Although violence was by no means the hallmark of Gaines's horror stories, when it did play a role, it was done in an imaginative and memorable fashion. In some cases perhaps too memorable.

When Gaines had been publishing the horror books for a couple years, the daily grind of coming up with a plot for Feldstein to script in one day became too much. He advertised in **Writer's Digest** and outlined what they were looking for:

*You should know this about our horror books. We have no ghosts, devils, goblins or the like. We tolerate vampires and werewolves, if they follow tradition and behave the way respectable vampires and werewolves should.*
*We love walking corpse stories.*
*We'll accept an occasional zombie or mummy.*
*And we relish the* contes cruels *(tales of sadism).*
*Virtue doesn't always have to triumph.*

Overall, that describes the type of stories that E.C. (Entertaining Comics) published in **Tales From The Crypt**. What it doesn't quite communicate is the power those stories achieved when Gaines and his editor/writer Al Feldstein really hit the mark.

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In the early issues, such as in **Crypt of Terror** #17, Gaines was still experimenting with the genre. While stories dealt with such horror characters as werewolves, they were usually set-ups for a twist ending where the werewolf turned out to be someone other than who you suspected (as in "Curse of the Full Moon!").

Wally Wood's first art on an EC horror story, in **Crypt** #18, is simple compared to his work of just a couple years later, but it does feature an interesting horrific dream sequence. Ingels first terror tale appears in issue 19; his art, too, only hints of the greatness to come.

In the stress of turning out so many scripts, Gaines and Feldstein occasionally borrowed plots from published stories, generally uncredited. When they adapted a couple Ray Bradbury stories without his permission in **Weird Fantasy**, he contacted them and—in a good natured fashion — worked out a method for them to continue the adaptations — giving credit. But Gaines and Feldstein had been borrowing from other writers as well. Even today fans occasionally turn up previously undetected swipes. One of their earliest is "RX...Death!" in **Crypt** #20. Drawn by Graham Ingels (a perfect choice), it's an uncredited adaptation of Arthur Machen's "The Novel of The White Powder." While altering some minor details, it includes unchanged lines of dialogue, particularly in the climax. The story deals with a man who gets the wrong drug in his prescription and is ultimately dissolved by it.

Other plots include such standbys as the disembodied hand and the executed criminal come back from the dead to take revenge. The latter plot, drawn by Feldstein for **Crypt** #21, ends with the victim attacking the living corpse and destroying it instead of just being victimized by it. Wally Wood turns in a fine effort on "Terror Ride!" in that issue. In that story, a couple in an amusement park find that a tunnel of terrors isn't fake. E.C. also had occasional reprints such as "House of Horror" in **Crypt** #21 which is reprinted from the first issue of **Haunt of Fear**—then only six months old. Illustrated by another new EC artist, one Harvey Kurtzman, it's an effective haunted house story about people vanishing without a trace. "Blood Type V" in the same issue features Graham Ingels going all out in a very atmospheric vampire tale.

"Reflection of Death" in **Crypt #23** is the last horror story that Feldstein drew for the title as the demands of both editing and writing became too much. He did manage to do a couple more fine covers, though, before relinquishing that spot to Jack Davis, who also took over the lead spot in **Crypt of Terror**.

Davis got off to a running start in issue 24 with "Bats In My Belfry!" about a man who goes to a doctor for unorthodox surgery which allows the blind to see again —with the eyes of a vampire bat. While identified with caricature and satire these days, Davis showed an early knack for conveying real horror. He drew them as they were written and didn't pull his punches. Frank Jacobs, writing of this period in his biography **The Mad World of William M. Gaines**, describes Davis as: "...a modest country boy from Georgia who could be sold the Brooklyn bridge, yet amazed the EC crew with his matchless scenes of gruesome, outlandish terror."

Graham Ingels approach to terror was different from that of Jack Davis. His style was one of fine lines and brush

strokes and he often employed chiaroscuro (the contrasting of light and dark in a scene to the exclusion of color) to achieve an effect. The technique was often obscured in color comics. It is very evident in the black and white reprints of the EC stories in Russ Cochran's handsomely produced **EC Library** series. But even in the original comic, this effect stands out in such stories as "Shadow Of Death!" (**Crypt #39**). A touching and bizarre little story of one *shadow* murdering another!

One of Wally Wood's last horror stories is in **Crypt #24**. "Scared To Death!" showed Wood's technique maturing so rapidly that he'd soon specialize in science fiction stories for Gaines as well as powerful tales of morality and social justice in **Shock Suspenstories**. "Scared To Death!" features one of EC's favorite horror motifs—the corpse returning from the grave to exact revenge. In this story (and even in a few horrific SF tales), Wood excelled at working screams into the artwork, rendering them as sound effects. They convey the horror and revulsion that a person being kidnapped by a rotting corpse might be expected to display.

## DEFORMITIES AND EXTREMETIES

"The Trophy!" (**Crypt #25**) is an odd case worth noting considering what EC would soon do in **Shock Suspenstories** just a few months later. It deals with a hunter who collects trophies of his kills and who, in turn, is collected as the living trophy of a madman. But the following issue contains a letter of comment which reads: "I'm a hunter — one of those 'despicable beasts' that you portrayed so viciously in your recent story, The Trophy. I think the analogy between animals and human beings was outrageous. I still say, 'They're only animals!'" To which the editors replied, "No hard feelings, boys! Just entertaining you-all!" Rather than defend their position, they actually backed down! It would be the last time that they did, as their sf mags would do stories dealing with vivisection and the shock books with racial and religious prejudice.

"The Ventriloquist's Dummy!" in issue 28 remains one of their most frightening stories. It actually has an ending which is unpredictable and a mystery almost impossible to solve, although the revelation makes perfect, if horrific, sense. This story exemplifies the trend EC was having towards becoming very wordy in their stories as the captions (which went far towards establishing an intense mood) and dialogue often crowd the panel art in this story. To those of us who like stories which have a lot of work put into them, and yet also like good panel art, it comes across as a mixed blessing.

"Grounds For Horror" in **Crypt #29** is an odd and disturbing story. It deals with the child-abuse of a boy at the hands of his step-father. While locked in the closet, the boy makes friends with, well, something he calls "Hozir"

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and which we never see. The story can be read as the boy having a real invisible playmate or that he is unknowingly psycho-kinetic, which is even more horrifying considering what befalls the man after he beats the child up. Jack Davis renders the family very convincingly, particularly the surly step-father.

"Gas-tly Prospects!" in **Crypt** #30 has always been one of my favorite EC stories. The cover feature of the issue (one of Jack Davis's best and most ghastly), it tells the story of a corpse that won't stay buried. But unlike the familiar corpse coming back from the grave on its own, this one isn't a fantasy as it's fate which conspires to make life miserable for the old prospector's killer.

While today, writers might feel that people afflicted by horrible diseases, like leprosy, or with other deformities, should be treated with some sensitivity, EC comics reflected the prevailing attitudes of the Fifties wherein such people were regarded as freaks and easy objects of horror. One such story is "The Thing In The 'Glades!" (**Crypt** #31), which is also the first art that Al Williamson did for E.C. Although he was more interested in drawing sf, the only script on hand when he first went in was "Mad Journey," which he reluctantly accepted after turning in "The Thing..." The horror strip had jungle settings, which he liked, while the sf strip had introductory pages of characters just talking, which he hated. When he applied himself, though, "Mad Journey" turned out very well after all. "The Thing In The 'Glades!" is one of the only two horror strips Williamson drew for EC (The other appears in **Vault of Horror** #37).

## MORE HORROR

George Evans did his first horror strip for **Crypt** in issue #32. "Roped In" is more of an sf story in that it involves swindlers who get their just desserts from a giant spider!

This issue has an appropriate letter which reads: "Your stories are the most revolting, the most repulsive, the most disgusting stories I have ever read. When I read your magazine, I get sick to my stomach. I'm not alone in this opinion. All my friends think the same thing. Keep up the good work."

E.C.'s horror hosts were The Old Witch, the Vault Keeper and the Crypt Keeper. While having similar personalities, EC tried to give them their own identities. "Lower Berth!" (**Crypt** #33) has the origin of the Crypt Keeper, whose parents were the corpses of a two-headed man and an ancient Egyptian mummy! Drawn by Jack Davis, the story is just a very weird tale without the usual EC shock elements.

**Tales From The Crypt** #34 features a Jack Davis cover of the traditional Frankenstein monster and he also illustrates the accompanying story which is told from the point of view of the monster who doesn't realize he's a monster! (Not unlike H.P. Lovecraft's "The Outsider"). This issue also features EC's adaptation of the Ray Bradbury story "There Was An Old Woman!", well drawn by Graham Ingels.

The werewolf cover by Davis on **Crypt** #35 is one of EC's most vivid horror images as it portrays the beast almost

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leaping out of the cover while its victim lies sprawled in the background. This issue also features the classic "Midnight Mess!" drawn by Joe Orlando. It's one of Orlando's best EC jobs and it's well known for being the tale about the vampire restaurant with the bizarre spigot in the neck climax. But it should also be noted for its fine renderings of old houses which help evoke the thick atmosphere in the story. The plot was adapted for the screen in the film **Vault of Horror**. This is an unusual issue as it features a werewolf, vampires as well as a mummy (in the last story in the issue, finely rendered by Graham Ingels). They generally didn't use that many traditional monsters in the same issue.

**Crypt #36** also has some recognition as it has the Jack Davis illustrated story about a vampire taxicab driver! This story is a good example of EC's then unique approach to scripting in that captions often read like paragraphs lifted from a novel. For instance:

You slam down the trunk-lid of your taxi-cab and look around. The night is damp and a faint trace of fog drifts in from the bay, chilling you to the bone. You stand there for a moment, shivering. You fumble in your jacket pocket for a cigarette, pull out a half empty pack and shake one between your lips. The flame of the match, flaring up in the gloom, burns your eyes, and even after you've blown it out, it's glow still dances before you...

That's what fans mean when they refer to the writing in EC's. Even in the often wordy comics of today, one seldom encounters writing as evocative as that.

"The Handler" (also in **Crypt #36**) is an adaptation of a truly gruesome Bradbury story with a sense of humor as black as anything seen in films like **Reanimator**. It's the story of an undertaker and the pranks he plays on his cold friends.

"Stop! You're Killing Me!" in issue **#37** is one of the few Bill Elder illustrated horror stories and has a particularly grisly ending.

That issue is wrapped up with "The Rover Boys!" drawn by Graham Ingels. One of EC's more unusual stories, it's an sf tale about brain transplants which has a rather improbable denouement in which dogs (which had human brains transplanted into them) take revenge by transplanting their tormentor's brain into a horse! Very bizarre.

**NEXT MONTH: MORE TERRIFYING CHILLS!**
**We complete our survey of Tales from the Crypt.**

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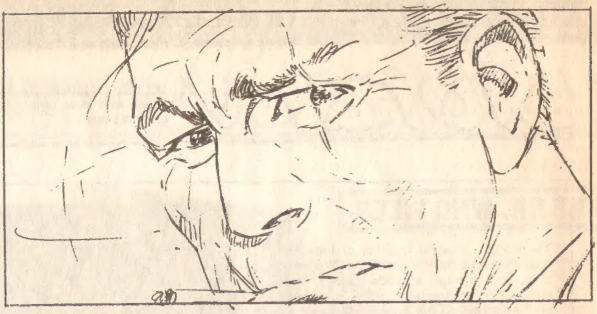
# WARS LARGE AND SMALL

# 'THE NAM -AND- MERC



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## MERC

Doug Murray is also writing one of the books in the New Universe line, **The Merc**. Naturally, as with any writer, he has his own ideas as to what should be done with the book. "There's essentially a whole new creative team on the book," Doug explains. "Jim Owsley had originally planned to keep **The Merc**, and edit it sort of free-lance. That didn't work out too well, so Larry Hama is now editing **The Merc**. Originally, Peter David and I were going to share the writing, but now I'm doing one hundred percent. A couple of the stories in the pipeline when Owsley left went astray, and the issues had to be done fast — in the case of issue 5, very hurriedly. 6 and 7 are fillers done because Gray Morrow had the flu and was unable to draw them on schedule. The book was already a month behind at that point, so number 7 was done by Val Mayerik. Those three issues together are filler issues, done while the editorial and creative change took place. Starting with number 8, Gray Morrow will be the regular artist on the job, I'll be the regular writer and Larry Hama will be the regular editor. We'll keep that team for the time being, at least.

"One of the problems that Larry and I had, coming onto the book, was that we really disliked the way that the character of the Merc had gone. The original character, as Archie Goodwin had created him, is not the same character as he now exists. He was originally conceived as a sort of **Terry And The Pirates** character, with a realistic bent, who was hopping around the world and being involved in various hot-spots. What has happened is that he's become a character who's almost doing soap-opera stuff, hanging around New York and being involved with his ex-wife and her new husband, and all these domestic adventures, ending in gunfights. We were pretty unhappy with that. The upshot is that I've done a couple of bridge stories in which things start to happen, and the Merc actually shoots one of his own companions for what seem to him to be excellent reasons. That leads into some odd things, for one thing what the mercenaries have is...I hate to say the term 'Mercenary Code,' but that's probably accurate... If you're contracting a mercenary to do a job for you, and there's this guy who broke his contract on his previous job, well, you're going to think twice about hiring him.

"So in number 6, Hazard breaks a contract because he realizes that he should never have been involved in it in the first place. One of the problems I have with the character is that as he's constituted, he was essentially working for Treetop. Treetop takes the contract, Treetop pays his rent, Treetop gives him his spending money. To solve this, I have Treetop take this contract, which turns out to be a really bad contract. They're acting as bodyguards for a person running for major office somewhere in Middle Europe, who turns out to have a real Nazi background, and is doing all the brownshirt tactics that we saw in the Thirties. Hazard realizes he can't live with that, and changes sides. In the course of changing sides, he shoots Treetop. He doesn't *kill* him, but he shoots him up pretty good. This leads into the following issue, which is a South American situation, where Hazard needs someone like Treetop, and has to use a replacement. Mal won't go with him on this assignment, because Mal isn't sure whether he can trust Hazard or not, since he shot Treetop.

## KILLING OFF A HAZARD

"As of number 8, Hazard is having a hard time getting any kind of contract. He ends up taking a questionable one from a source he thinks is the Vatican, but turns out not to be. He ends up breaking *that* contract, too, so obviously now he's got problems... In number 9, I'll be introducing a new character, who'll be the one taking the contracts, rather than Hazard. This will work into a situation where Larry and I are going to kill Hazard off. He's gotten so far away from what he was supposed to be that it would be difficult to bring him back in any kind of line with reality. I'm working out a storyline that will go over two or three issues where Hazard realizes he's going to have a hard time making a living in the mercenary business. He tries to get out of the business, but there are other problems. His ex-wife's husband has already tried to kill him once, back in issue #2, and there is a showdown between the men during which Hazard gets shot up. Then in **The Merc Annual**, which will be out sometime this summer, we'll be doing an origin story, which tells us about everyone's relationships with Hazard, how he met everybody, how he became a mercenary in the first place. The issue will end with him dying. That's

something rather unique, I believe — a character's origin and death in one issue!

"Then we'll have a new character who'll be **The Merc** of the title. It's been done before, killing off a character and replacing him, but never so early in a series. But really, the character has gotten so out of control and so far from what we wanted that it would be very difficult for us to bring him back into line. The problem is that he's become a really unsympathetic character. He's a big, hulking brute who is not very good looking and not very likable. He charges his friends to do things for them, as we saw in #2 and #3. He's not the kind of person you'd want to bring home to meet your mother, or that you'd want to meet on the streets. That's a difficult kind of character to attain any kind of relationship with. The reader can't identify with him because he's not that sort of person you really want to know. So we want to change that, and the easiest way to change that — and the most realistic — is to get rid of him. We'll do that as interestingly as possible, and then replace him.

## A NEW MERC

"We'll be going back to Archie's original concept of a guy who is as much a soldier of fortune as a mercenary. A guy who makes his living going from brush war to brush war and from adventure to adventure, rather than a guy who sits in Manhattan and goes to his son's baseball games. The new Merc will take his own contracts, and when he doesn't, he'll drop into adventures by accident. He'll be a little more humorous than Hazard was; he'll be a little more likeable. He'll be a little more *normal*. He's not going to be this six foot four hulk who can beat anybody at anything. He'll be five foot ten, slim and kind of good-looking, who's good at what he's good at, but is not infallible.

"Essentially, he's a Black Irishman. When I say that, I don't mean he's an Irish black!" (The Black Irish are descendants of the Irish who interbred with the wrecked sailors from the Spanish Armada, washed up on their shores in 1588. Since they are a trifle swarthier than the average, they are known as Black Irish. JP). "He comes

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from a long line of naval officers, and becomes a SEAL in Vietnam. That's the naval version of the Special Forces groups. He was in Vietnam for a couple of years, which is where he met Hazard. When he gets out of the Navy, he becomes a Sky Marshal, but gets thrown out because he makes the mistake of stopping a hijacking by using his gun. That's something they frown upon in the Sky Marshals. He can't see the point of being a Sky Marshal if he's not allowed to stop hijackings, so he's glad to go. He becomes a cop for a while, till he realizes that as soon as he puts the guys behind bars, they get let go again anyway. He doesn't feel like he's accomplishing anything that way. He kind of drifts into becoming a mercenary. He's still doing what he's done for his entire life, only now he's getting paid for it, and he feels like he's making some kind of difference.

"Unlike Hazard, he takes his own contracts, and he's very careful about what kind of contracts he takes. He makes sure he's on what he considers to be the right side before he takes a contract. He lives in Brooklyn with his old grandfather, who gives him some advice. He's got some oddities about him, which we'll get into in the book — he keeps pigeons, and likes to play the piano, things like that. We'll probably maintain the Mal character, who I kind of like, and he's going to still need a demolitions expert. The Sergeant-Major will stick around, and I'm bringing in a guy who's an ex-SAS captain from Britain, who's a new character. So we'll have a fairly large amount of supporting characters who'll be around, and be used in various issues. It's a more serious and realistic version of **The A-Team**, though it's not the same team over and over again. The lineup changes from issue to issue, depending upon the mission, depending on who he needs.

"Keep in mind that most mercenary missions these days are training missions. You go into Afghanistan, or Central America or South America, and you're involved in some sort of movement. Most of the time, what the mercenary is really doing is bringing the arms in, teaching the people to use them and then getting the hell out. A mercenary team, even a very large mercenary team—and a very large mercenary team would be 20 or 30 men — just cannot win a war! Not with 20 or 30 men! All they can do is act as a cadre of a larger group and teach them how to do it. In the current world, what you're talking about is a group that teaches the Afghans better ways to fight Russian helicopters, or teaches the Contras in Central America a better way to do what they're doing. Or they do stuff in South Africa, or Zimbabwe, or anything in the little hot-spots of the world, doing their bit to keep them hot. We'll get into some of that kind of thing.

"We're talking about the sort of thing that Chuck Norris did in **Firewalker**, or Clint Eastwood's done for his whole career. That's the sort of thing. The new character will allow us to be a little more light-hearted than we could have been with Hazard. Just his very appearance makes it very difficult to do any kind of comedy with him. Peter David actually managed to do some good throw-away lines for the character, but they didn't really work because they were out of character *physically* with the man, and it just didn't fit."

Doug is pleased to be working with veteran artist Gray Morrow on this project. "I've known him for a long time, but I've never worked with him before. He's very precise, and he can do people in virtually any way at all. He's very easy to work with because of that. We can discuss what a character is like in terms of what his hobbies are like, what his likes and dislikes are, and he can build a character out of that. He can draw a character who looks like the character I talk about."

With **The Nam** and **The Merc**, Doug Murray has reopened a genre of comics storytelling long thought dead: non-superpowered tales of action and adventure in the tradition of Milton Caniff and Noel Sickles. Superman move over, The Merc is here!

**CF**

# MARK HAZZARD:
# MERC